

**6 WORLD**

- Delta jet flips upside down on snowy Toronto runway, all 80 aboard survive
- Top Russian, US officials meet for talks on Ukraine war without Kyiv

**8 NATION**

- Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar, who oversaw LS and J-K polls, demits office
- PM to launch all latest industrial policies of MP during GIS inauguration: CM Yadav

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**THE HILLS TIMES**

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Voice of the hills people

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## War of words between Gaurav, Himanta on 'CM creating ISI-link controversy in fear of losing 2026 Assam polls'

**GUWAHATI, Feb 18:** Amid controversy over his British wife's alleged links with ISI, Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi on Tuesday claimed that Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's "fear of losing" the 2026 assembly polls is the main reason behind the recent developments.

Sarma and the BJP have been attacking Gogoi, the deputy leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha, over his British wife Elizabeth Colburn's alleged connection with Pakistan's spy agency.

"The BJP government in Assam can conduct their enquiry. Every Assamese person knows the real reason behind recent developments," Gogoi said in a post on X.

"Himanta Biswa Sarma is afraid that he will lose his chair and will have to face justice from the people of Assam after the 2026 assembly elections," he added.

The Assam Police on Monday constituted a Special Investigation



Team (SIT) to probe a case against Pakistani national Ali Tauqeer Sheikh for his social media comments on Assam and India's internal affairs.

The Assam Cabinet on Sunday decided not to register any case against the parliamentarian or his British spouse but instructed the DGP to file an FIR against the Pak-

## Ex-CM Tarun Gogoi's role come under scrutiny Rakesh Paul's appointment to APSC questioned in 'cash-for-job' probe report

**GUWAHATI, Feb 18:** The role of former Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi in appointing Rakesh Paul—first as a member and later as chairman of the Assam Public Service Commission (APSC)—has come under scrutiny in an inquiry commission report.

During Paul's tenure, large-scale irregularities in civil service examinations were uncovered.

The one-man Justice (Retd.) BK Sharma Commission, which separately investigated anomalies in the 2013 and 2014 Combined Competitive Examinations (CCE), described Paul's appointment process as "ill-founded, paving the way for widespread corruption."

Both the reports, which had been previously submitted to the state



government, were tabled in the Assembly on Monday.

The APSC was embroiled in a cash-for-jobs scam uncovered in 2016, leading to the arrest of nearly 70 people, including Paul and over 50 civil and police officials.

Paul was appointed as a member

of the APSC in 2008 and became the chairman in 2013, a position he continued to hold till his arrest in 2016. The report highlighted that during his tenure, he oversaw more than 200 selections, raising concerns about irregularities in other recruitments too.

The report revealed that Paul's appointment was based solely on a personal application he submitted to the CM on September 6, 2008, without any formal selection process or background verification.

"Astonishingly, it was on the basis of a simple application made by Paul on 06-09-2008 and addressed to the then Chief Minister of Assam, he was recommended for membership of the APSC without any (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Gauhati HC grants bail to YouTuber Ashis Chanchlani in obscenity case

**GUWAHATI, Feb 18:** Gauhati High Court on Tuesday granted interim bail to YouTuber Ashis Chanchlani in connection with a case for allegedly promoting obscenity in a publicly accessible online show.

Chanchlani is one of the persons named in the case in Assam, in which podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia was the key accused because of his controversial comments on YouTube show 'India's Got Latent'.

Hearing an anticipatory bail petition by the accused, a single-judge bench of Justice Mrudul Kumar Kalita granted Chanchlani interim relief and asked him to be present before the investigating officer within 10 days.

Chanchlani's counsels Diganta Das and Joyraj Borah argued that their client did not utter anything in the show, and the allegations in the FIR were made against the co-accused persons only.

The FIR was registered by Guwahati Police on a complaint of an individual on February 10 under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS), Information Technology Act, Cinematograph Act and Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act.

The advocates of the petitioner pointed out that the Supreme Court earlier in the day granted interim protection from arrest to prime accused podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia over his comments on the show.

On the other hand, the public prosecutor opposed the grant of any interim protection on the ground that the accused failed to comply with the police notice issued to him in spite of receiving it.

After hearing both sides, Justice Kalita granted him the interim bail and said: "The petitioner shall appear before the investigating police officer within 10 days from the date of this (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Union Minister Sonowal inaugurates Jogighopa Inland Waterways Terminal

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 18:** Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal inaugurated the Inland Waterways Terminal (IWT) at Jogighopa, officially dedicating it to the nation on Tuesday.

Marking the occasion, he flagged off MV Trishul, accompanied by barges Ajay and Dikshu, carrying 110 metric tonnes of coal and stone chips to Bangladesh.

Hailing the terminal as a milestone in India's waterways sector, Sonowal emphasised its role in regional trade, connectivity, and economic development.

"Today marks a historic day for the waterways transportation sector in the country as we dedicate the IWT Terminal at Jogighopa to the people and to the nation. Under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, the waterways transportation has been undergoing a tremendous



transformation propelling India's logistics growth, propelling us towards Modi ji's vision of 'Viksit Bharat,'" he said.

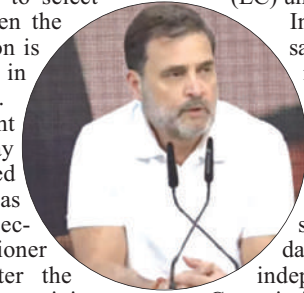
The terminal, envisioned as a strategic trade hub, was initiated with the foundation stone laid by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in February 2021.

Located 91 km from Gelephu in Bhutan, 108 km from the Bangladesh border, and 147 km

## Disrespectful for PM, HM to have made midnight decision to appoint new CEC: Rahul

**NEW DELHI, Feb 18:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday said it is "disrespectful" and "dis-courteous" for the prime minister and home minister to have made a midnight decision to select the new CEC when the process of selection is being challenged in the Supreme Court.

The government late on Monday night appointed Gyanesh Kumar as the new Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), hours after the meeting of the prime minister-led selection committee in which the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha asked the government to defer the meeting in view of the Supreme Court hearing in the matter. Gandhi also presented a dissent note to the panel, of which Home Minister Amit Shah is also a member. The Supreme Court on Tues-



day said it would on February 19 take up on "priority basis" the pleas against the appointments of the chief election commissioner (CEC) and election commissioners (EC) under the 2023 law.

In a post on X, Gandhi said, "During the meeting of the committee to select the next Election Commissioner, I presented a dissent note to the PM and HM, that stated: 'The most fundamental aspect of an independent Election Commission free from executive interference is the process of choosing the Election Commissioner and Chief Election Commissioner'."

"By violating the Supreme Court order and removing the Chief Justice of India from the committee, the Modi Government has exacerbated the concerns of hundreds (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Drugs worth ₹ 14 cr seized; one held

**GUWAHATI, Feb 18:** A person was arrested with heroin and Yaba tablets worth around ₹ 14 crore in Assam's Cachar district, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Tuesday.

"Massive Drug Bust in Ramprasadpur. In a major breakthrough, @cacharpolice, under the jurisdiction of Dholai Police Station, intercepted a vehicle. Upon a thorough search, police recovered 40,000 Yaba tablets and 260 grams of Heroin, worth a market value of ₹ 14 crore," Sarma said in a post on X. During the operation, a suspected drug peddler was arrested, the CM said.

Sarma lauded the efforts of Assam Police in making the state drug-free.

Yaba is a tablet form of a mixture of methamphetamine (a powerful and addictive stimulant) and caffeine. (PTI)

## India, Qatar aim to double trade to USD 28 bn in 5 years

**NEW DELHI, Feb 18:** India and Qatar on Tuesday agreed to double bilateral trade to USD 28 billion over the next five years and announced elevation of their relationship to the level of strategic partnership as Prime Minister Narendra Modi held wide-ranging talks with Amir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani.

The two sides also signed two agreements in the presence of Modi and the Amir here. The first is on establishment of a strategic partnership and a revised double taxation avoidance agreement was also signed.

The two sides also signed five memoranda of understanding (MoUs) to strengthen economic partnership, step up ties in areas such as management of archives, and cooperation in youth affairs and sports.

"The strategic partnership agreement actually elevates the present state of bilateral relationship to a strategic level. What we are looking at is deepening cooperation in fields of trade, energy security, as well as in regional and international fora," Arun Kumar Chatterjee, Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, told reporters here after the talks.

In response to a query, he said the strategic partnership agreement will cover the "entire spectrum" of the bilateral relationship.



"Definitely, a road map will be drawn for cooperation in future and then both sides will work towards implementing the strategic partnership agreement. As and when the security related issues would come up within the agenda, definitely will be discussed under the strategic partnership agreement," the secretary said. Modi and the Amir held talks with focus on trade, investments, technology, energy and people-to-people ties, further cementing the "deep and traditional relationship" (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Citizens of BTR hail Budget Session held in Kokrajhar

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, Feb 18:** Citizens across communities and organisations in Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) lauded the inaugural session of the Budget Session of the Assam Legislative Assembly (ALA) being held at the BTC Legislative Assembly House, Bodofa Nwgrv in Kokrajhar on Monday.

The session marked a historic day for Assam Legislative Assembly, as the session for the Assam budget was conducted for the first time outside the existing Legislative Assembly at Dispur.

The session also focused on a special discussion on the Sixth Schedule in the assembly.

All elected members representing ruling and opposition parties including chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and other ministers took part in the budget session.

Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya delivered his inaugural speech highlighting the welfare and developmental initiatives initiated by the state government and Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). Biswajit Daimary, speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly

chaired the Budget Session that focused on social integration and tranquility among the citizens.

Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region hailed the smooth completion of the inaugural session of Assam Legislative Assembly in Kokrajhar, stating that the day marked a milestone in BTR's legislative history.

"A landmark day in BTR's legislative history. The day of 17th February, marked an epoch moment for both BTR and Assam as Kokrajhar—the City of Peace—hosted the Budget Session of Assam Legislative Assembly for the first time ever outside Dispur. This transformative journey has been made possible by the visionary leadership of Hon'ble PM Adarniya Shri Narendra Modi Ji and the decisive resolve of Hon'ble Home Minister, Mananiya Shri Amit Shah Ji, whose unwavering commitment to lasting peace in BTR has reshaped our region's present and future," CEM Boro said. CEM Boro has extended his heartfelt gratitude to His Excellency, Governor Lakshman Prasad (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Police rescue minor girl from Guwahati

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 18:** Assam Police has recovered an alleged kidnapped girl and apprehended the accused from Guwahati, said an official statement on Tuesday.

The matter came to light after girl's father Suresh Pramanik lodged an FIR stating that his 19-year-old daughter was kidnapped while she was returning home after giving HS final exam.

Father in the FIR also named the person, identified as Mohibur Khan, who was allegedly involved in the kidnapping of her daughter after threatening.

"Approximately 03:45 PM while his 19 years old daughter was returning home from Dimoria College after the ongoing H.S final exams, one Mohibur Khan (21yrs), S/O Md Raja, residing at Sonapur Balligate, PS-Sonapur, Dist-Kamrup(M), threatened the complainant's daughter and forcefully kidnapped her and fled from the scene," the official statement added.

Following the FIR, the police swung into action and recovered the girl from Guwahati. The police also arrested Khan over the charges of kidnapping.

## Unemployment rate among urban women declines to 8.1 percent Unemployment rate dips to 6.4 pc in December quarter: Survey

**NEW DELHI, Feb 18:** The unemployment rate for people aged 15 years and above in urban areas dipped to 6.4 per cent in the October-December quarter, according to the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).

Joblessness, or unemployment rate, is defined as the percentage of unemployed people in the labour force.

The unemployment rate in the December quarter of FY24 was 6.5 per cent. However, the rate stayed flat when compared sequentially.

In the preceding July-September quarter of FY25, the rate of unemployment for people aged 15 years and above in urban areas was at the same level of 6.4 per cent, the 25th Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) showed.

The unemployment rate among



females (aged 15 years and above) in urban areas declined to 8.1 per cent in October-December 2024 from 8.6 per cent in the same quarter a year ago. The rate was 8.4 per cent in July-September, 2024.

Among males, the unemployment rate in urban areas remained flat at 5.8 per cent in October-December 2024 as compared to the rate of the same quarter a year ago. The rate was 5.7 per cent in July-September, 2024.

Labour force participation rate in

Current Weekly Status (CWS) in urban areas for people aged 15 years and above increased to 50.4 per cent in October-December from 49.9 per cent in the same quarter a year ago. The rate was 50.4 per cent in the July-September 2024.

Labour force refers to the part of the population, which supplies or offers to supply labour for pursuing economic activities for the production of goods and services and, therefore, includes both employed and unemployed persons.

The NSSO had launched PLFS in April 2017. On the basis of PLFS, a quarterly bulletin is brought out giving estimates of labour force indicators namely unemployment rate, worker population ratio (WPR), labour force participation rate (LFPR), distribution of workers by broad status (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Rain fails to Dampen spirit at 51st Karbi Youth Festival

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Feb 18:** Rain played spoilsport on the fourth day of the ongoing 51st Karbi Youth Festival (KYF) at Taralango on Tuesday. However, despite the inclement weather, visitors remained undeterred as a large crowd thronged the festival grounds.

The day began with overcast skies, and by 1 p.m., heavy rain lashed Taralango. But even the downpour could not dampen the festive spirit. Enthusiasts were seen exploring various venues, dressed in traditional Karbi attire—women in their bright pini-sarong, pekok (shoulder cloth), and peh sarpi (Karbi traditional dress for women), while men sported white se-leng adorned with Karbi patterns, choi hongthor (tunic), and poho (turban), adding to the vibrancy of the festival.

Despite ongoing events across multiple stages, many visitors were busy browsing the traditional and handicraft complex, purchasing Karbi costumes and



bamboo and cane handicrafts when the sudden downpour began. Festival-goers took shelter wherever possible—in stalls, offices, restaurants, and ethnic houses. On the streets, boys and girls in festive mode shielded themselves from (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Markets end slightly lower after a day's breather as foreign fund outflow persists

MUMBAI, Feb 18: Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended marginally lower on Tuesday as uninterrupted foreign fund outflows and lower-than-expected corporate earnings continued to hit investors' sentiment.

After a day's breather, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex ended 29.47 points or 0.04 per cent lower at 75,967.39. Intra-day, it dropped 465.85 points or 0.61 per cent to 75,531.01.

The NSE Nifty dipped 14.20 points or 0.06 per cent to settle at 22,945.30.

"On Tuesday, the Indian blue-chip equity indices, Sensex and Nifty-50, closed with a slight decline, primarily due to a slowdown in earnings and concerns over ongoing foreign selling, which affected market sentiment," Ameya Ranadive, Chartered Market Technician, CFTe, Sr Technical Analyst, StoxBox, said.

From the Sensex pack, IndusInd Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, UltraTech Cement, Hindustan Unilever, Sun Pharma, Tata Consultancy Services, ITC and Asian Paints were among the biggest laggards.

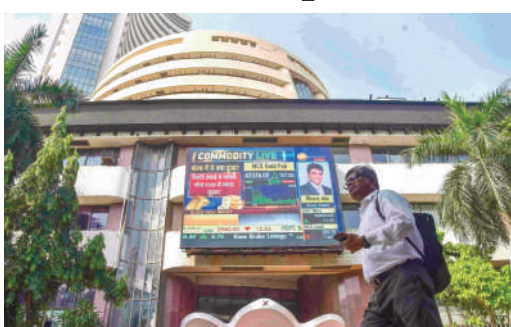
NTPC, Zomato, Tech Mahindra, Power Grid, Kotak Mahindra Bank and HCL Tech were among the gainers.

The BSE smallcap gauge dropped 1.71 per cent and midcap index declined 0.19 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, industrials dropped 1.51 per cent, consumer durables (1.19 per cent), telecommunication (1.06 per cent), capital goods (0.91 per cent), auto (0.65 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.55 per cent).

BSE utilities climbed 1.03 per cent, BSE Focused IT (0.86 per cent), oil & gas (0.70 per cent) and energy (0.38 per cent).

As many as 2,918 stocks declined while 1,032 advanced and 114 remained unchanged on the BSE.



"The domestic market has experienced both profit-booking and bottom-fishing amid persistent concerns over FII outflows and pressure on the INR. Small and midcap stocks continue to lag due to apprehensions about premium valuations. Meanwhile, India's trade deficit has widened beyond expectations, driven by rising imports due to depreciating domestic currency and surging commodity prices," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 3,937.83 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower. European markets were quoting mostly lower.

US markets were closed on Monday in observance of 'President's Day'.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.73 per cent to USD 75.77 a barrel.

The Sensex climbed 57.65 points or 0.08 per cent to settle at 75,996.86 on Monday, ending an eight-day losing run. The Nifty rebounded 30.25 points or 0.13 per cent to 22,959.50. (PTI)

## India must maximize resource efficiency to become developed by 2047: Yadav

NEW DELHI, Feb 18: Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav on Tuesday said India must maximize resource efficiency to achieve its goal of becoming a developed country by 2047.

Addressing the conclave on "Waste Recycling and Climate Change" here, Yadav urged industries to design products that support circularity and collectively adopt advanced recycling technologies.

He said recycling and reusing critical minerals could reduce India's dependence on other countries. "We need to move away from the take-make-dispose mindset and adopt recycling and reuse as an alternative economic model," Yadav said.

The minister said the major challenge facing policymakers is how to sustain economic growth while protecting natural resources.

He said recycling and reuse are the solutions.

"If we want to make India a developed country by 2047, we must minimize waste and maximize resource efficiency," the minister said.

Yadav said that India's circular economy could be worth USD 2 trillion by 2050 and create 10 million jobs. He said that industries should ensure circularity in product design and work collectively to embrace advanced recycling technologies.

"This is not just about one company. The industry as a whole must come forward. This will ensure higher recovery rates and better material utilization," he said.

Meanwhile, Union Environment Ministry Additional Secretary Amandeep Garg said India is one of the fastest-developing countries and its resource consumption is rising. This will also lead to increased waste generation, he added.

India currently generates 1.6 million tonnes of electronic waste, 1.15 million tonnes of battery waste, 1.3 million tonnes of used oil, 1.52 million



tonnes of waste tyres, 4.1 million tonnes of plastic waste, 10 million tonnes of end-of-life vehicle waste and 300 million tonnes of metal scrap.

However, he said, the country recycles only 33 per cent of e-waste, 2 per cent of construction and demolition waste, 15 per cent of used oil, 3 per cent of end-of-life vehicle waste and 14 per cent of metal scrap. "There is a huge gap and a great opportunity for the recycling industry to build a strong ecosystem," Garg said.

He added that India aims to generate 50 per cent of its total installed power capacity from non-fossil fuel sources which could help reduce carbon dioxide emissions by one billion tonnes.

"This transition requires large amounts of critical minerals for electric vehicles, solar and wind projects, and battery storage systems," he said.

However, most of these minerals are concentrated in a few countries. "About 55 per cent of critical minerals are found in just 15 countries," the official said.

India imported 13 critical minerals worth USD 5.47 billion in 2022-23. "Looking at the overall scenario, it is clear that we must invest in recycling critical minerals. (PTI)

## Nothing's Phone (3a) Series promises major camera upgrades

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 18: London-based technology company Nothing has announced that its upcoming Phone (3a) Series will introduce significant camera enhancements, setting a new benchmark for smartphone photography. The flagship-level camera system is expected to deliver professional-quality photos and videos in a variety of lighting conditions.

The Phone (3a) Series will feature a 50MP periscope lens, offering 3x optical zoom, 6x in-sensor zoom, and 60x ultra zoom, ensuring crisp macro shots and a 70mm portrait-perfect focal length. The TrueLens Engine 3.0 utilizes advanced AI tone mapping and scene detection, allowing for next-generation computational photography that balances clarity and realism.

Compared to its predecessor, the Phone (2a), the main sensor in the Phone (3a) Series captures 64% more light at a pixel level and boasts a 300% increase in full well capacity. This enhancement translates to deeper colors, better low-light performance, and improved overall image quality.

Additionally, all four sensors support Ultra HDR photo output, while the main and front cameras enable 4K video recording with enhanced stability and night mode improvements.

Nothing has confirmed that the Phone (3a) Series will be officially unveiled on March 4 at 3:30 PM IST. Consumers eager to stay updated on the launch can sign up for notifications on Flipkart.in.

Contd. from Page 1...

## War of words between Gaurav,

an advisor of the Pakistan Planning Commission and a former colleague of Colburn, was charged under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). In a press conference on Monday, the Lok Sabha MP had claimed that Sarma has been changing his stance every day.

"Earlier, the chief minister had attacked me and I was the villain. But since yesterday, he has made me the victim," Gogoi claimed. Sarma had on Sunday said that the opposition leader might be "trapped or blackmailed" in the larger "anti-India" conspiracy and expressed sympathy for him.

The BJP leader had, last week, targeted the Assam MP over the issue, demanding responses to the allegations of ISI links.

Sarma had also alleged that the deputy leader of Congress in the Lok Sabha had raised questions in Parliament on sensitive defence matters after his marriage to the British citizen, a charge termed by the opposition leader as a "false accusation".

The BJP had also accused Gogoi's wife of having links with Pakistan and the neighbouring country's spy agency ISI, a charge rejected by the Congress leader as "laughable and entertaining". Gogoi had alleged that the BJP took extreme steps to defame him and his family and asserted that he would take appropriate legal action against the saffron party in this regard. (PTI)

## Rakesh Paul's appointment

selection process and verifying his antecedents," the report said. It added that Paul "fraudulently represented himself as a Senior Practising Lawyer of Gauhati High Court (which he was not)". Barring his application and biodata, no documents to support his credentials were submitted. The former CM endorsed the application with a brief note: "May be considered."

The file was processed swiftly, with the proposal reaching the Governor on September 19, 2008, followed by the Chief Minister's final approval on September 29. His appointment notification was issued the next day, September 30. "Be it stated here that on perusal of the related criminal case records, it is found that allegedly there was some kind of intimacy between Paul and the then Chief Minister, Assam and both used to share the platform at Satsang Vihar," the Justice (ret'd) Sharma commission said. The panel said Paul was recommended for chairmanship after five years of his tenure as a member by "adopting the same device" and added, "... Paul was recommended by a note dated 18-10-2013 of the then Chief Minister, Assam to the Chief Secretary..." The file was processed for governor's approval in November and December 2013, with the nod given on December 5 and a notification dated December 7 appointed Paul as the APSC chairman.

A clause in this notification concerning the terms and conditions of his appointment was deleted nine months later, which conferred on Paul the benefit of six years of service as the chairman on completion of his term as member of APSC.

The report maintained that Paul made APSC a 'shop selling jobs', as he was "emboldened by the manner and method in which he was first inducted as member of the APSC and then made the chairman". The commission noted that the prescribed procedures were "flouted with impunity" in the process of Paul's appointment. It also criticised the blatant violation of prescribed procedures, stating that while the CM had the authority to appoint APSC members and the chairman, the proposal should have come from the concerned department secretary. The report emphasised that such appointments "cannot be made in the air" without due process.

"Apart from the fact that such a procedure wholly lacked the laid down procedure in the Rules of Executive Business, but even if had been followed, cannot be said to be in a desired manner," the report said. "The very inception and for that matter induction of the Chairman by the particular process discussed above itself was ill-founded paving the way for all-round corruption," it added. (PTI)

## Union Minister Sonowal

of ₹82 crore, the Jogighopa terminal features a reinforced concrete (RCC) jetty with an Electric Level Luffing (ELL) crane for cargo handling.

It also includes an administrative building, customs and immigration offices, a truck parking area, an 1,100 sq m covered storage space with power backup, and an 11,000 sq m open storage area.

Speaking on the transformative impact of inland waterways, Sonowal stated, "The development of inland waterways holds great promise for transforming the logistics sector in India. By leveraging our extensive network of rivers and water bodies, we can create a sustainable, cost-effective, and efficient mode of transportation for goods." He credited revolutionary legislative measures, such as the National Waterways Act, 2016 and the Inland Vessels Act, 2021, for empowering India's inland water transport sector.

The event was attended by Lyonpo Namgyal Dorji, Bhutan's minister of industries, commerce & employment, Assam ministers Ranjeet Kumar Dass, Bimal Borah, Jogen Mohan, MP Phani Bhushan Choudhury, and IWAI chairman Vijay Kumar, IAS, among others.

Several inland waterway projects are underway in the Northeast, including the comprehensive development of NW-2, a ship repair facility at Pandu, and terminal developments at Bogibeel and Pandu.

With significant investments flowing into the North-Eastern waterways, Sonowal asserted that the region is emerging as a logistics and trade powerhouse. "Under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, the Northeast has transformed into a growth multiplier with Assam spearheading this transformation. As we cruise towards realizing the vision of Viksit Bharat, the immense potential of the Northeast has a major role to play."

The Brahmaputra River (National Waterway 2) is expected to play a pivotal role in boosting trade. Sonowal emphasised that the IWT Terminal at Jogighopa would be a key step towards enhancing regional connectivity and promoting trade with neighboring countries like Bangladesh and Bhutan. The inland waterways sector has witnessed remarkable growth over the past decade, with a 76% increase in operational national waterways and a 72% rise in cargo volume.

Cargo traffic surged from 18 million tonnes in 2013-14 to 133 million tonnes in FY 2023-24, growing at a CAGR of over 22%. Budget allocation for the sector has also seen an 860% increase, further strengthening infrastructure and logistics.

Beyond cargo transport, India's inland waterways have seen significant growth in river cruise tourism. The MV Ganga Vilas, hailed as the world's longest river cruise, has highlighted India's potential as a cruise tourism destination.

The number of river cruise vessels has grown from just three in 2013-14 to 25 in 2023-24. A world-class river cruise terminal is under development in Guwahati, alongside four dedicated cruise terminals at Silghat, Bishwanath Ghat, Neamati, and

Guujan. The Modi government has also launched the 'Cruise Bharat Mission', aiming to double cruise passengers and calls by 2029.

Plans include setting up 10 sea cruise terminals, 100 river cruise terminals, and five marinas to enhance India's tourism and connectivity. Sonowal also highlighted plans for urban water transport systems in 18 cities across 12 states, including Guwahati, as part of the IWAI's effort to replicate the successful Kochi Water Metro model. With the Jogighopa IWT Terminal now operational, it is set to bolster trade, improve connectivity, and strengthen India's inland waterways sector, cementing the North-east's role as a key economic hub in India's logistics network.

## Gauhati HC grants bail to

order and shall cooperate with the investigation." The high court also said that Chanchlani shall not directly or indirectly make any inducement, threat or promise to the informant or to any other persons, who may be acquainted with the facts of the case so as to dissuade such person from disclosing the facts before the investigating officer or to any court. The high court fixed March 7 as the date of the next hearing and ordered the production of the case diary.

Aside from Allahabad and Chanchlani, others named in the case in Assam are comics Samay Raina, Jaspreet Singh and Apoorva Makhija. Several FIRs were lodged against Allahabad, popularly known as BeerBiceps, for the comment on parents and sex on YouTube show "India's Got Talent". The Supreme Court on Tuesday granted interim protection from arrest to Allahabad while calling the show "vulgar" and saying he had "dirty mind" which put the society to shame. (PTI)

## Disrespectful for PM, HM

of millions of voters over the integrity of our electoral process," he also said in his post while sharing his dissent note. Gandhi said as the Leader of Opposition, it is his duty to uphold the ideals of Babasaheb Ambedkar and the founding leaders of the nation and hold the government to account. "It is both disrespectful and discourteous for the PM and HM to have made a midnight decision to select the new CEC, when the very composition of the committee and the process is being challenged in the Supreme Court and is due to be heard in less than forty-eight hours," he also said.

In his dissent note presented before the panel, Gandhi cited the speech of B R Ambedkar while speaking in the Constituent Assembly in June 1949 to discuss the setting up of an independent Election Commission, where he had warned about executive interference in India's democracy and the affairs of the Election Commission.

Gandhi said in a judgement on March 2, 2023, the Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court ordered the appointment of the CEC and election commissioners should be undertaken by a committee comprising the prime minister, Leader of Opposition and Chief Justice of India.

"The Supreme Court judgement reflected the larger concern among hundreds of millions of voters over the integrity of our electoral process. This is also reflected in public surveys that show a continuing decline in trust of voters in India's election process and its institutions. "Unfortunately, soon after the Supreme Court order, the Government of India notified a legislation in August 2023 that bypassed the spirit and the letter of the Supreme Court's order," he said.

Gandhi said the government legislation reconstituted the committee to appoint the CEC and Election Commissioners to include the prime minister, Leader of Opposition and a Union Cabinet minister to be appointed by the prime minister and removing the chief justice from the committee.

"This is in flagrant violation of the letter and spirit of the Supreme Court order," he noted. He said this government order was subsequently challenged by a public interest litigant and the Supreme Court has indicated its intention to take up this matter on February 19, 2025, which was less than forty-eight hours away.

"Therefore, it is the view of the Congress party that the process of choosing the next CEC be deferred until the Supreme Court hearing and this meeting be postponed," he said. On Tuesday, a bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kottiswar Singh was informed by advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for an NGO, that despite the Constitution bench verdict of 2023 directing selection and appointment of the CEC and ECs through a panel, including the Chief Justice of India, the government excluded the CJI and made a "mockery of democracy". (PTI)

## India, Qatar aim to double

between the two countries, the MEA said. Chatterjee said Modi and the Qatari Amir also decided to set a target to double bilateral trade from the current USD 14 billion to USD 28 billion over the next five years.

Last year, during Modi's visit to Qatar, India had signed a USD 78 billion deal to extend LNG imports from the Gulf nation by another 20 years till 2048 at rates lower than the then prevailing prices.

They also exchanged views on "regional and global issues" of mutual interest. Naturally, the Middle East situation and the evolving situation over there came up for discussions. Both sides conveyed their mutual positions that we have on the Israel-Hamas issue. India conveyed its own position, the Qatari side conveyed their own position and we exchanged views. Both the leaders had discussions on that," Chatterjee said when asked if the West Asia situation figured in the talks. He was also asked what will the strategic partnership entail and if defence cooperation is expected to be part of it. "At this moment, we are not talking about any kind of defence-related cooperation," he said.

Earlier in the day, the Amir was accorded a ceremonial guard of honour at the Rashtrapati Bhavan as President Droupadi Murmu welcomed the visiting leader. Modi was also present on the occasion. The Amir arrived here on Monday evening, his visit coming almost a year after Modi had visited the Gulf nation in February 2024. Extending a rare gesture of hospitality, Modi received him at the Delhi airport on Monday evening. He welcomed him with a warm handshake and hug, displaying the bonhomie between the two leaders.

India and Qatar today enjoy "deep-rooted friendly relations anchored in historic trade and people-to-people ties". Both countries commemorated the 50 years of establishment of diplomatic relations in 2023. The Amir is accompanied by a high-level delegation, which includes Qatar's Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, as well as the ministers of commerce and industry, energy, electronics and information technology, labour, and the Minister of State for foreign trade, Chatterjee said. CEOs of several top Qatari entities such as Qatar Investment Authority and Qatar Tourism are also part of the delegation, he said. The Amir has a meeting with President Murmu later in the evening. She will also host a banquet reception in honour of the Amir and the accompanying delegation thereafter. Qatar is also an important partner for investments in India. "Both leaders today identified a number of areas in which the Qatar Investment

Authority can increase investments in India. This includes infrastructure, ports, ship-building, energy including renewable energy, smart cities, food parks, start-ups, and new technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and machine learning," Chatterjee said. Also, a Joint Business Forum was held on Tuesday in which top industrialists, companies and institutions of both countries held very productive interactions.

Earlier, the Joint Business Council between India and Qatar met virtually, and the Amir's visit should lead to "further growth in mutual investments," Chatterjee said. India and Qatar share a "very vibrant partnership" in the area of energy.

"Qatar is a major source of LNG for India. Both leaders today noted that in February 2024, Qatar Energy and Petronet LNG Limited had signed an agreement for supply of 7.5 million metric tonnes per annum of LNG from Qatar to India for 20 years starting 2028," Chatterjee said. Both leaders also discussed ways to further strengthen and broaden the energy partnership including "exploring mutual investments".

The Amir's visit provided an "excellent opportunity" for the top leadership of the two countries to discuss and "cement a strategic partnership for enhanced future cooperation", the MEA official asserted. (PTI)

## Citizens of BTR hail Budget

Acharya for his continued guidance, and "Karmayogi" CM Himanta Biswa Sarma, whose dynamic leadership is propelling BTR to new heights of development. "I extend my heartfelt gratitude to His Excellency, the Hon'ble Governor Shri Laxman Acharya Ji, for his continued guidance, and to our "Karmayogi" CM Himanta Biswa Sarma dangoriya, whose dynamic leadership is propelling BTR to new heights of development," he further said.

He also expressed his sincere appreciation to speaker Biswajit Daimary for presiding over this historic session, as well as to all the esteemed cabinet ministers and MLAs for their wholehearted participation in this significant moment. "My sincere appreciation also goes to Hon'ble Speaker Shri Biswajit Daimary dangoriya for presiding over this historic session, as well as to all esteemed cabinet ministers and Hon'ble MLAs for their wholehearted participation in this significant moment. This historic session marks not just a milestone, but a new era of governance and collaboration—one that will further strengthen Assam's federal democracy, accelerate BTR's progress, and pave the way for a brighter, more inclusive future," he added.

The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) has expressed its gratitude and sincere thanks to the chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma and state government of Assam for organising the first ever budget session of the Assam Legislative Assembly being held at the BTC Legislative Assembly House in Kokrajhar.

ABSU president, Dipen Boro stated that the day of Budget Session's Inaugural day, marked a historic day and a landmark in the history of BTR's legislative. "We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Hon'ble Chief Minister Srijit Himanta Biswa Sarma emphasising for passing of the bill and efforts made for 125th Amendment of constitution for the Sixth Schedule Council during his recent speech as per our demand and appeal at the first-ever Budget Assembly Session of BTCLA in Kokrajhar. His support reinforces the collective commitment to safeguarding the rights, identity, and implementation of the Bodo Accord, 2020. We indeed are looking forward towards continued collaboration for a prosperous and harmonious future of Bodoland", Boro said.

Commenting on the session a senior citizen in Kokrajhar said, "we witnessed a historic moment as Assam Legislative Assembly held its inaugural budget session in Kokrajhar on February 17, which seems like a ceremony in the history of BTR's legislative procedure". "We are very excited after witnessing the Assam Legislative Assembly session in Kokrajhar—the city of peace. We extend our heartiest gratitude and sincere thanks to CEM of BTR, Pramod Boro and CM Himanta Biswa Sarma for taking bold initiative to host the Budget Session in Kokrajhar," the citizen added.

## Unemployment rate dips

in employment and industry of work in CWS. The estimates of unemployed persons in CWS give an average picture of unemployment in a short span of seven days during the survey period. In the CWS approach, a person is considered unemployed if he/she did not work even for one hour on any day during the week but sought or was available for work at least for one hour on any day during the period.

Labour force, according to CWS, is the number of persons either employed or unemployed on average in a week preceding the date of the survey. LFPR is defined as the percentage of the population in the labour force. (PTI)

## Rain fails to Dampen spirit

the rain using peh sarpi or seleng (Karbi shawls), while some creatively used hoton (Karbi traditional baskets) as makeshift hats.

Being the fourth day of the festival, Taralanso witnessed a convergence of people from diverse backgrounds—various communities, tribes, religions, and languages—adding color and a spirit of unity to the celebrations.

Babu Rongphar from Baithalanso, who came to sell his bamboo crafts such as be-leng, ingkrung, hak, hoton, and other traditional Karbi baskets, said the rain had impacted sales. However, another craftsman, Bidya Singbar from West Karbi Anglong, said, "I have sold half of what I brought, and if the rain subsides, I hope to sell more."

Dhonsing Ronghang, a visitor from West Karbi Anglong, shared, "I came with my family to experience the festival, but the rain has prevented us from exploring all the stalls and venues. If it stops, we'll visit the departmental exhibition, ethnic village, and competitions." As the evening approached, excitement built up for marquee events like the group song competition, drama, Miss KYF 2025, and Mr. Nokbe 2025, drawing in a sea of spectators. It is worth mentioning that various traditional and contemporary activities continued at the festival. One major highlight of the fourth day was the Thong Nokbe Ketat (half-marathon race), covering a 21-km route from Taralanso to Diphu town and back. The race was open to both men and women.

The Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), a sports enthusiast himself, inaugurated the marathon at Clock Tower, Taralanso. A total of 900 runners, including some of the youngest such as Kangthir Kramsa of Dillai, participated.

Sangmir Teronpi topped the women's category with a time of 1:02:39. Makale-mayun Minarashi took the second spot at 1:04:49, and Filingza Hansepi came third.

In the men's category, Tikheswar Kurmi from Golaghat clinched first place, covering the distance in 32:12:53. Nicki Bharti from Guwahati secured second place with a time of 52:18:98, while Rinku Das from Lumding came third at 53:02:84.

Following the race, CEM Ronghang awarded cash prizes, trophies, and certificates to the winners. The event was attended by PWD Development Board Chairman Longsing Tokbi, District Sports Officer Relip Ronghang, Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA) General Secretary Dr. Pankaj Teron, and KASA Football Secretary Horen Engti. All participants received certificates for their participation.

## Emphasises public safety at District-level event in Silchar MP Parimal Suklabaidya advocates road safety, honors achievers



**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Feb 18: The district commissioner's conference hall witnessed a significant gathering as stakeholders from various sectors came together to mark the conclusion of National Road Safety Month here on Tuesday.

The programme, organised under the chairmanship of district commissioner Mridul Yadav was graced by Silchar MP Parimal Suklabaidya as the chief guest. The event not only celebrated achievements in road safety awareness but also highlighted the collective efforts of the district in reducing road accidents.

The month-long observance, held from January 1 to 31 culminated with the distribution of

awards and commendations to departments and organisations that played pivotal roles in spreading road safety awareness.

The Cachar Police, PWD (Roads), district health department, education department, excise department, and the voluntary organization Netaji Chhatra Yuva Sangstha were recognized for their dedication and impactful contributions throughout the campaign.

The programme also turned the spotlight on young achievers, with students from GC College, Narsing Higher Secondary School, Sonai Nitya Gopal Higher Secondary School, and MC Das College receiving prizes for their outstanding performances in the

road safety quiz competition. Their participation underscored the importance of youth engagement in building a culture of road safety.

Further solidifying the district's commitment to safer roads, the District Road Safety Committee of Cachar distributed essential road safety equipment to key departments, including the superintendent of police, the district transport officer, and the joint director of the district health department. This initiative aimed to bolster enforcement capabilities and promote safer driving practices across the district.

In his address, Silchar MP Parimal Suklabaidya praised the district administration and

participating departments for their collective efforts, which contributed to a significant decline in road accident fatalities in 2024 compared to previous years. He attributed this achievement to consistent public awareness campaigns and the enforcement of traffic regulations. The MP called upon all stakeholders to sustain these efforts and continue working together to make Cachar's roads safer.

Emphasizing personal accountability, Suklabaidya delivered a firm message: "Road safety is everyone's responsibility. Whether during public rallies or private journeys, rules must be followed. I have instructed that anyone found without a helmet in my political rallies should be fined on the spot, without exception. Safety cannot be compromised under any circumstances."

The event concluded with attendees taking a solemn pledge to uphold road safety measures and work collectively to transform Cachar into a model district for road safety. The gathering resonated with a shared commitment to public safety, ensuring that the momentum generated during National Road Safety Month translates into sustained action on the roads.

The event was also attended by the superintendent of police, Numa Mahatto, additional district commissioner, Antara Sen, additional district commissioner, Van Lal Limpuia Nampui, District Transport officer, Ramesh Shyam and other dignitaries.

## Zila Sainik Welfare Office in Cachar hosts ex-servicemen rally

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Feb 18: The Zila Sainik Welfare Office (ZSWO), Cachar, is set to host an Ex-Servicemen Rally on March 16 onwards at the Multipurpose Hall, Sonai Bazar, under the Sonai Circle.

This significant event will bring together ex-servicemen from the Army, Navy, and Air Force, along with widows and their dependents. The rally aimed to honor their invaluable contributions and foster a sense of community among the veteran fraternity.

In the lead-up to the rally, ZSWO Cachar conducted an impactful Sensitization and Outreach Programme for youths and students on February 13 at Barak Valley Senior Secondary School, Niz Banskandi, under Lakhipur co-district. The programme was organized under the Governor of Assam's initiative, "Rashtriya Kritagyata Evam Jaagrakta Yojana". Retired Lieutenant Colonel Th Kunjal Singh, ZSWO Cachar, served as the resource person, sharing his experiences and insights with approximately 65

students, five teaching and non-teaching staff, and ten NCC cadets.

During his address, Lt Col Singh emphasized the pivotal role of discipline in shaping both individual and national progress. He highlighted how the youth stand as the pillars of national transformation and elaborated on the indispensable role of the Armed Forces in protecting the country's sovereignty and integrity. The students were guided on exploring career opportunities within the Army and the advantages of transitioning to civilian careers, where military-acquired skills open numerous doors.

The session also shed light on the values of volunteering and selfless service to the nation, emphasizing the honor of wearing the uniform and the resilience required under pressure—both on the battlefield and in life. Lt Col Singh shared heartfelt anecdotes about the strength and fortitude of military families, especially during times of loss. His address underscored the importance of

## Senior citizens demand curb in curb proliferation of wine shops

**HT Correspondent**  
SIVASAGAR, Feb 18: All Assam Senior Citizens' Association (AASCA) in its 8th executive meeting held in Sivasagar issued a slew of demands on Monday.

The demands included increase in old age pension from ₹ 250 to ₹ 2000 per month, immediate curb on proliferation of the wine shops in nook and corners of the state, abrogation of toll gate fees for senior citizens and clearing of all footpaths in all towns and cities for free movement of the pedestrians especially the senior citizens.

The meeting held in the newly built Sivasagar District Senior Citizens' Bhawan, was presided over by Prof (Rtd) Suresh Saikia, president, AASCA. Saikia informed that the 8th biennial Conference of AASCA would be held at Duljajiang while the 9th session would be held at Nalbari in 2027. Meanwhile the mid-term session will be held in Hojai next year.

## Night curfew and movement restrictions along Indo-Bangladesh border in Cachar

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Feb 18: Cachar district Magistrate Mridul Yadav imposed strict restrictions along the Indo-Bangladesh border. It has been done to maintain public order and curb illegal activities.

The order, issued under Section 163 of the BNSS, aimed to prevent potential law and order disturbances arising from the movement of extremist elements and unauthorised transportation of commodities and cattle across the border.

The district magistrate highlighted the urgent need for preventive measures to tackle the apprehended threats. He emphasized that swift action was crucial to prevent unlawful activities, which could disrupt peace and security in the region. The order imposed specific restrictions effective immediately and would remain in force for two months unless otherwise directed.

According to the directive, a night curfew has been implemented, prohibiting any movement within a one-kilometer belt along the Indo-Bangladesh border in Cachar between sunset and sunrise. This measure aimed to curtail illegal cross-border activities and ensure heightened security during vulnerable hours.

In addition, a strict ban has been imposed on any movement on the river Surma and its high banks within the Indian territory of Cachar during the same hours.



The order also restricted fishing activities on the river Surma, with exceptions only for local residents who obtain prior permission from the circle officer of Katigorah, along with authorization from the lessee. A copy of such permission must be submitted to the district magistrate and the commandant of the 170th Battalion BSF, Dholcherra.

To curb illegal transportation of essential commodities, the order prohibited carrying items such as sugar, rice, wheat, edible oil, SK oil, and salt by any means, including vehicles, carts, or rickshaws, between sunset and sunrise within a five-kilometer belt inside the Cachar district boundary along the Bangladesh border. However, the Circle Officer of Katigorah Circle may grant special permits for transportation after verifying the purpose and obtaining clear-

ance from local supply officials. Copies of these permits must be forwarded to the district magistrate and the commandant of the 170th Battalion BSF.

The order exempted state and central government employees on duty from these restrictions. Issued ex parte in the public interest, the directive came into force immediately and would be effective for two months from February 18, 2025.

The district magistrate, through this order, has reiterated the administration's commitment to maintaining law and order while ensuring that the interests of local residents were safeguarded through a regulated permit system. The cooperation of the public has been sought to uphold peace and security in the border areas during the enforcement of these measures.

## APSC scam report: BJP claims corruption during Cong rule proven

**GUWAHATI, Feb 18:** The BJP on Tuesday alleged that the enquiry committee's report on the 'cash-for-jobs' scam in Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) has exposed the "massive corruption" under the then-Congress government headed by Tarun Gogoi.

The reports of the Justice (retd) BK Sharma Commission which probed the anomalies in the conduct of APSC's Combined Competitive Examination (CCE) 2013 and 2014, were laid in the assembly on Monday.

The reports have named former APSC chairman Rakesh Paul as the "mastermind", while also raising questions on the process of appointment of the tainted official during Gogoi's tenure. Over 70 people have so far been arrested in this connection.

The Congress party is yet to respond to the issue.

State BJP president Dilip Saikia described the late Tarun Gogoi as the "kingpin of corruption", demanding stringent action against all accused mentioned in the report.

Addressing a press conference here, Saikia said, "The Justice (Retd) BK Sharma Commission report has exposed the massive corruption during Congress rule under former chief minister Tarun Gogoi. Our allegation that an entire generation of students lost out on opportunity due to this corruption has been proved true."

He maintained that the observations of the Commission and testimonies recorded before it proved that the Congress and corruption are "two sides of the same coin".

"Tarun Gogoi was the kingpin of corruption and the Congress must now answer the people. The party must come out with a white paper explaining its position," Saikia asserted.

The BJP state president also urged the state government to take stringent action against those named in the reports.

Meanwhile, Rajjor Dal chief and MLA Akhil Gogoi, whose name along with former colleague Kamal Kumar Medhi's name featured in a testimony of one of the accused, claimed no involvement in the scam.

Medhi, however, is now in the ruling BJP.

In the statement recorded before the Commission, one of the accused alleged that a bribe of ₹ 3 lakh was received by Medhi on behalf of Akhil Gogoi.

"As per the report of the investigation agency of APSC Scam, it has been mentioned that BJP leader Kamal Kumar Medhi had taken a bribe of ₹ 3 lakhs in my name. Kamal Kumar Medhi should publicly clarify on this matter," Akhil Gogoi, an MLA, posted on X. Gogoi and Medhi were leaders of Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS), with Rajjor Dal being the political offshoot of the organisation.

Rajjor Dal, in a press statement, said the findings of the Justice (Retd) Sharma Commission's reports proved the allegations of corruption in APSC that the KMSS had raised long ago.

On the charge of Akhil Gogoi receiving a bribe through Medhi, it maintained that the KMSS had launched a series of agitations against corruption in APSC from June 5, 2015, during which Gogoi was arrested also.

"If we had accepted money from Paul, our party could not have carried out such sustained movement against him," the Rajjor Dal claimed. (PTI)

## District holiday on Shiva Ratri in Sivasagar

**HT Correspondent**  
SIVASAGAR, Feb 18: Sivasagar district commissioner Ayush Garg IAS on Monday through an order declared Feb 27 as a holiday in the district under Negotiable Instruments Act, 1881 in view of the four-day Sivaratri Celebrations and the historic Mela beginning on Feb 25.

All Board and Council Examinations have been excluded from the purview of the holiday, a PR stated.

## Flood preparedness meeting held in Hojai



**HT Correspondent**  
HOJAI, Feb 18: The District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) Hojai conducted a flood preparedness meeting at the conference hall of district commissioner at Srimanta Sankardev Nagar, Hojai on Tuesday.

The meeting was chaired by Bidyut Bikash Bhagawati, ACS, district commissioner cum chairman, DDMA, Hojai and attended by Saurab Gupta, SP, Hojai, CEO, Zila Parishad, ADC cum CEO, DDMA, Circle Officers, EOs, DPO, DDMA, FOs and HoDs of all key departments. The discussion was held on the preparedness measures taken by the departments to ensure mitigation of upcoming flood and its impact in the district. The chair requested all HoDs to submit a comprehensive report on resource inventories, identification of vulnerable areas, Model Relief Camps, CFS, Raised Platforms, Major & Minor Population of vulnerable villages etc.

## Sankar Sangha files complaint against TAYPA

**HT Correspondent**  
MARGHERITA, Feb 18: Srimanta Sankardev Sangha Margherita sub-divisional branch on Tuesday has filed police complaint against Tai Ahom Yuba Parishad Asom (TAYPA) for allegedly burning the copy of the constitution of the Sangha. Members of TAYPA allegedly burnt the copy of the constitution on Monday at Sonari in Charaideo.

The TAYPA allegedly burnt the constitution following expulsion of Sangha's member Chandra Baruah. Baruah took part in the Me-Dam-Me-Phi celebration which had irked Sangha resulting in his expulsion. Sangha has condemned the incident and demanded disciplinary action against the TAYPA members involved in the incident.

Bhadeswar Chutia president of Margherita sub divisional branch Srimanta Sankardev Sangha said that Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardev a social reformer, artist and spiritual guide among other titles made immense contribution towards the development of Assamese culture. The Mahapurush founded the neo-Vaishnavite movement known as Ekasrana Dharma which has spread across the world but unfortunately the burning of constitution has hurt sentiments."

## Prohibitory orders in view of CBSE exam in Sonitpur

**HT Correspondent**  
TEZPUR, Feb 18: To ensure the smooth and peaceful conduct of the Class X and Class XII examinations by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) from February 15 to 4th April 2025, district magistrate Ankur Bharali has issued a prohibitory order under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023. This order is effective immediately and applies to all examination centers in Sonitpur District and will remain in effect until the completion of the examination process.

As per the order, entry within a 50-meter radius of examination centers has been restricted to candidates with valid admit cards, supervisory staff, examination checking squads, law enforcement agencies, and government person-

nel engaged in examination-related duties. Parking and movement of vehicles within 50 meters of the examination centers were prohibited, except for authorized personnel on duty. The use of high-volume loudspeakers, DJs, public address systems, microphones, and similar equipment, whether stationary or mobile, has been banned within a 100-meter radius of examination centers. Mobile phones, calculators, Bluetooth devices, smartwatches, earphones, and other electronic communication gadgets are not permitted inside the examination premises, except for the center in-charge and authorized personnel. No food stalls or shops will be allowed within a 100-meter radius of the examination centers. Only designated supervisory staff is permitted to guide candidates to their allotted seats.

## First of its kind café in remote border village Tuting Heights boasts women empowerment, economic growth



**HT Correspondent**  
DIBRUGARH, Feb 18: In a landmark initiative, Café Tuting Heights—the first of its kind in Arunachal Pradesh's Tuting was inaugurated on Tuesday marking a significant step towards community-driven development, women empowerment, and economic growth in this remote border village.

This unique venture was a testament to the collaborative efforts of the Indian Army and local villagers, demonstrating the power of unity and innovation.

The café not only introduced a new culinary experience to Tuting but also created sustainable employment opportunities,

boosting the local economy and promoting tourism in the region.

A key highlight of this initiative was women empowerment, as local women entrepreneurs take charge of managing and running the café.

Their dedication and entrepreneurial spirit set a remarkable precedent, inspiring future generations.

To honor their efforts, Certificates of Excellence were awarded, recognizing their hard work and commitment.

Café Tuting Heights is more than just a café—it is a symbol of progress, resilience, and self-reliance, paving the way for continued development in India's border villages.

## Carpenter hits dumper, loses life

**HT Correspondent**  
SIVASAGAR, Feb 18: One person killed in a road mishap near Jhanji Lefera gaon on NH-61 under Gaurisagar PS on Monday night. Madhab Hazarika (37), s/o Paniram Hazarika of Chikirichuk village in Jhanji, riding his motorcycle (No AS 04 P 4793) hit a dumper truck parked on the roadside. He died while taken to Sivasagar Civil Hospital. Hazarika, a carpenter, leaves behind his wife and a minor son.

## Biswanath journalists receive CM's gift

**HT Correspondent**  
BISWANATH CHARIALI, Feb 18: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's Good Will gift for the recognised journalists was formally handed over to the working and recognised journalists of Biswanath by district administration on Tuesday. In this connection a ceremonial programme was held at the conference hall of the office of the district commissioner, Biswanath.

Munindra Nath Nagaty, district commissioner, Biswanath handed over the tokens of Good Will to the recognised journalists. Addressing the short session district commissioner sought active cooperation from the media fraternity in highlighting the developmental and welfare schemes that are going on in the district. Pranab Ojha, a working journalist and president of Sootea Press Club addressed the session on behalf of the journalists. Ranjit Saikia conducted the proceedings. The programme was attended by Hriday Kumar Das, ADC, Pushpankar Patir, assistant commissioner cum DIPRO (i/c), Girish Hazarika, administrative officer besides other dignitaries.

## Congress and corruption are two sides of the same coin: Dilip Saikia

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Feb 18: "The report submitted by Justice Biplab Kumar Sarma on corruption in the Assam Public Service Commission has thoroughly exposed the neck-deep corruption and misdeeds committed by the Congress regime headed by former chief minister Tarun Gogoi. By pushing a generation to the abyss of darkness and meting out grave injustice to the meritorious and deserving candidates by opening a market for jobs by the then Government has been brought to the fore by the report," this was stated by BJP Party President, Assam Pradesh, Dilip Saikia while talking to the press at the state BJP head office here on Tuesday.

Saikia said the report has brought out startling disclosure on former chief minister late Tarun Gogoi and his son Gaurav Gogoi and has proved that corruption and Congress are two sides of the same coin.

"Congress denotes Corruption, Corruption denotes Congress," the party president quipped.

The party president said the Congress Party must bring out a White Paper on the mega scam during its rule and clarify its position to the people of the State. Saikia said that by playing with the young generation of the state and pushing them into oblivion, those involved in this neck-deep corruption were enemies of the society at large.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*I didn't think; I experimented*  
- Anthony Burgess

## PM's special gesture to Amir of Qatar

In a special gesture Prime Minister Narendra Modi went to the Indra Gandhi International Airport on Monday and received the Amir of the State of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani. And in another special gesture, because the Amir is extraordinarily tall, security personnel assigned to stand at guard at the foot of the plane's air-stairs were also picked for their extraordinarily height. Bottom-line, appeasement comes in different heights and the Modi dispensation knows this better than its predecessors. Prime Minister Modi has been only 10 years at the helm but the Modi-brand of appeasement went international quite early during his reign. Also, there is no denying the fact that this is paying dividends. Having said that, Modi has a special "something" for Qatar, courtesy which Qatar enjoys 'stardom' with Indian Muslims, who also cotton to the fact that Qatar stands firm with the Palestinian cause and Qatar is a safe haven for the Hamas leadership. That Qatar's most celebrated TV news network keeps slamming Modi's India for various infractions is besides the point. The Modi regime dotes on Qatar and slights are forgotten, and forgiven. When Qatar sentenced eight retired Indian Navy personnel to death for "spying", Prime Minister Narendra Modi had to "take a knee."

The Qatar Amir pardoned those on the death row. It was a close shave with death. The Modi ecosystem gloated "Modi hai toh mumkin hai", which is Standard practice. But there was also the Nupur Sharma case when Qatar targeted India's trade with Qatar and India's perishables lay rotting at Qatar's gateways. Modi could not bear the Qatar coldshoulder. To this day, the Modi dispensation refuses to call Qatar's despicable treatment of India "blackmail." The fact is, the Modi government is queasy when it comes to Gulf Cooperation Council countries; both the Modi Government and Prime Minister Modi reveal their true colours. The long and short is, there is a coquettishness associated with Modi's treatment of Hindus. Modi has been flirting with the Hindu community for a decade and more. Modi has been working according to a plan, depending on when the next election would be?

Like what are the Modi government's plans for the Places of Worship Act, 1991? The Supreme Court has been hearing the case and wanted the Modi government to take a stand? But the Modi government continues to play truant. The latest is, the Modi government will not come out. It wants the Places of Worship Act, 1991 to continue as it is. Unlike Qatar, the 'Sahishnu' Hindu vote-bank of the BJP can't and won't do a thing. The BJP's Hindu vote-bank has nothing to bargain with. "Went to the airport to welcome my brother, Amir of Qatar H.H. Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani. Wishing him a fruitful stay in India and looking forward to our meeting tomorrow," wrote Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 'X'. Modi is as shrewd as they come. Modi knows full well what the Amir of Qatar stands for and how he should be treated? Also, Prime Minister Modi knows what the BJP's Hindu vote-bank amounts to and is capable of doing?

## Shivaji Maharaj: The warrior king of India

By: Satyabrata Borah

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj holds an unparalleled place in Indian history. He is a warrior king, visionary ruler, and the founder of the Maratha Empire. His legacy is deeply rooted in India's struggle for self-rule and resistance against foreign dominance. Born in 1630 at Shivner Fort, Shivaji displayed remarkable leadership qualities from his young age. His upbringing, deeply influenced by his mother Jijabai and his mentor Dadoji Kondadev, instilled in him a sense of duty, justice, and devotion to his land. Shivaji's military acumen was evident early in his life when he captured forts like Torna and Purandar, laying the foundation of the Maratha Empire. His guerrilla warfare tactics, now studied in military strategy, allowed him to outmaneuver much larger armies. Using the rugged terrain of the Sahyadri mountains to his advantage, he launched surprise attacks and swift cavalry raids, making it nearly impossible for enemies to anticipate his moves. His ability to adapt and innovate in battle earned him the reputation of a military genius.

One of Shivaji's most significant achievements was his naval expansion. Recognizing the importance of securing the coastline against foreign powers such as the Portuguese and Siddis, he built a formidable navy. Forts like Sindhudurg and Vijaydurg were constructed to strengthen maritime defenses, making Shivaji one of the pioneers of naval warfare in India. His vision for a strong navy laid the foundation for India's later naval strategies.

Apart from his military achievements, Shivaji's administrative skills were exemplary. His governance was based on justice, efficiency, and inclusivity. He established the Ashtrapadhan, an eight-member council of ministers responsible for different aspects of administration. This system ensured smooth governance and accountability. His revenue policies were farmer-friendly, eliminating unjust taxes and promoting agricultural productivity. Unlike many contemporary rulers, he encouraged trade and commerce, which con-

tributed to the prosperity of his kingdom.

Religious tolerance was another hallmark of Shivaji's rule. Despite being a staunch Hindu, he respected all religions and treated his Muslim subjects with fairness. He employed people based on merit rather than religion, a stark contrast to the prevailing sectarian policies of other rulers. His respect for women was also noteworthy; he strictly enforced laws to protect women from harassment and exploitation, setting a high moral standard for his administration.

Shivaji's coronation in 1674 at Raigad Fort marked a significant moment in Indian history. Declaring himself the Chhatrapati, or sovereign ruler, he emphasized self-rule (Swarajya) and independence from foreign domination. His coronation was not just a political event but a cultural resurgence, reinstating Hindu traditions and practices that had been overshadowed by centuries of foreign rule.

Shivaji's conflicts with the Mughals, particularly Aurangzeb, form a crucial chapter of his legacy. He successfully resisted the vast Mughal Empire, proving that strategic brilliance and determination could triumph over numerical superiority. His escape from Agra in 1666, where he was held captive by Aurangzeb, is legendary. Using his wit and planning, he managed to outsmart his captors and return to Maharashtra, a feat that remains a testament to his ingenuity. Shivaji was hundred times more powerful than Aurangzeb.

The forts that Shivaji built and maintained are enduring symbols of his vision and foresight. Raigad, Pratapgad, and Simhagad, among others, were not only military bastions but also centers of governance and administration. These forts continue to stand as monuments to his legacy, attracting historians and tourists alike.

Shivaji's influence extended beyond his lifetime. His strategies and governance model inspired future leaders, including the Peshwas, who expanded the Maratha Empire to its zenith. His ideals of self-rule and resistance against oppression influenced freedom fighters like Bal

Gangadhar Tilak and Veer Savarkar during India's independence movement. Tilak's famous declaration, "Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it," was deeply rooted in Shivaji's philosophy.

Shivaji's legacy is honored in various ways in modern India. Numerous institutions, airports, and roads are named after him. His statues and memorials stand tall in many cities, reminding the people of his contributions. His birth anniversary, Shivaji Jayanti, is celebrated with great fervor, reflecting his enduring impact on Indian society.

The Indian Navy acknowledges his contributions by commemorating him as a pioneer of maritime defense. His principles of governance, military strategy, and administrative efficiency are studied in academic institutions. His life has been depicted in literature, cinema, and theater, ensuring that his story continues to inspire generations.

Shivaji's vision of Swarajya was not just a political ambition but a deeply cultural and nationalistic movement. He revived the concept of indigenous rule. He promoted self-reliance and unity among the people. His emphasis on local governance and people's participation in administration set a precedent for democratic principles in India.

His respect for different cultures, ethical governance, and innovative warfare tactics make him a timeless figure in Indian history. He was not merely a conqueror but a nation-builder, laying the groundwork for a self-sufficient and resilient India. His ability to inspire, lead, and protect his people cements his place as one of the greatest leaders India has ever produced.

Even centuries after his reign, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj remains a symbol of courage, wisdom, and justice. His life story is a source of motivation for those fighting for justice, equality, and self-rule. His contributions to military strategy, governance, and cultural revival continue to shape India's historical and national identity. His legacy is immortal. He reminds every Indian of the power of determination, strategic brilliance, and unwavering devotion to one's land and people.

## Me-Dam-Me-Phi and Ali-ai-Ligang: A deep dive into the traditions of the Tai-Ahoms and Misings

Cultural identity plays a pivotal role in shaping an individual's sense of self and belonging. It is the intricate web of traditions, beliefs, rituals, and shared experiences that define a person and a community. In a diverse country like India, where cultural pluralism is the norm, maintaining the uniqueness of different cultures is essential. This process of preservation not only fosters pride but also creates a sense of unity within the community, ensuring its survival amidst the multitude of influences that characterize a multiethnic and multilingual society. Assam, one of the northeastern states of India, is a remarkable example of this cultural diversity. It is home to various tribes and communities, each with its unique set of traditions, rituals, and festivals that define their cultural identity. Among the most prominent of these communities are the Tai-Ahoms and the Misings, whose distinct cultural identities are preserved through their festivals: Me-Dam-Me-Phi and Ali-ai-Ligang, respectively.

The concept of cultural identity can be best understood as a blend of individual self-perception and collective belonging. It is the feeling of being part of a group that shares similar customs, values, language, and traditions. A community's culture, which includes everything from festivals to food habits, religious beliefs to dress codes, serves as a mirror of its identity. Assam, with its complex mosaic of tribal and non-tribal populations, is a melting pot where different cultural identities coexist. Among these, the Tai-Ahoms and Misings stand out, not only due to their history but also because of the way they have managed to preserve their cultural practices.

The Tai-Ahoms, originally from China, have a deep and rich cultural heritage that spans centuries. Their identity is tightly interwoven with their religion, rituals, and festivals, the most significant of which is Me-Dam-Me-Phi. This festival, celebrated annually, is a socio-religious occasion that involves making offerings to the ancestors and gods. The term "Me-Dam-Me-Phi" literally means "offerings to the ancestors and gods," a practice that underscores the belief in the di-



vine nature of the dead. Unlike many other religious practices that focus on rebirth, the Tai-Ahoms believe that the dead become gods after death and ascend to heaven. The rituals performed during this festival are not just acts of worship but are seen as a way to invoke blessings from the ancestors for peace and prosperity in the present life.

Historically, the festival was an essential part of the Ahom kings' religious practices. It was celebrated after victories in war, serving as a way to honor the gods and ancestors who had supposedly ensured their success. It was also believed that failure to observe the festival in its customary manner could result in natural disasters, political upheaval, and military defeat. For the Tai-Ahoms, Me-Dam-Me-Phi is more than just a religious event; it is a symbol of their unity and strength as a community, an expression of their historical and cultural identity. The festival's roots date back to ancient times when the Ahom kings were advised by their ancestors to celebrate the ritual annually to maintain their rule over the masses. The connection between the Me-Dam-Me-Phi and the Tai-Ahoms' historical narrative is an embodiment of the belief that cultural identity is shaped not just by contemporary practices but also by historical legacies. The Me-Dam-Me-Phi festival,

celebrated on January 31st each year, thus serves as a critical cultural event for the Tai-Ahoms. It is not only a religious gathering but also a reaffirmation of the community's identity, an identity that has been preserved even amidst the socio-political changes in Assam. The Ahoms' ability to maintain their traditional customs, despite centuries of cultural and religious influences, stands as a testament to the resilience of their cultural identity.

Similarly, the Misings, another indigenous group of Assam, also celebrated on January 31st each year, thus serves as a critical cultural event for the Tai-Ahoms. It is not only a religious gathering but also a reaffirmation of the community's identity, an identity that has been preserved even amidst the socio-political changes in Assam. The Ahoms' ability to maintain their traditional customs, despite centuries of cultural and religious influences, stands as a testament to the resilience of their cultural identity.

The Misings, who belong to the Sino-Tibetan language family, have a distinct history of migration, which, while not well-documented, is passed

down through oral traditions, songs, and stories. They believe that their ancestors, particularly Abotani, the son of the Sun and Moon, hold the key to their identity. The Misings' religious practices are animistic, and their belief in various supernatural beings—ranging from malevolent spirits to benevolent ancestors—adds a mystical layer to their cultural heritage. The Donyi Polo religion, which venerates the Sun (Donyi), is central to their spiritual life, and it is a vital part of the rituals conducted during Ali-ai-Ligang.

The rituals of the festival involve the head of the family performing the initial sowing of seeds, invoking blessings for a bountiful harvest. The seeds are sown in a ceremonial manner, accompanied by prayers to the ancestors and gods, including Donyi Polo, to ensure good fortune in the agricultural year ahead. After the sowing, the entire community gathers for a feast, sharing food and rice beer (Apong) in a joyous celebration. The day concludes with traditional dances, including the Gumrag Soman, performed to appease Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth, in hopes of a prosperous harvest.

Ali-ai-Ligang is not just a festival; it is a cultural manifestation

### DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Dipak Kurmi

## Ali Ai Ligang: A cultural feast

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Ali Ai Ligang, the vibrant festival of the Mising community, is a celebration that transcends mere agricultural rituals. It is an embodiment of tradition, culture, and the unbreakable bond between the Mising people and the land they cultivate. Rooted in the region's rich history and agricultural practices, Ali Ai Ligang marks the beginning of the sowing season, specifically the sowing of Ahu paddy, a key staple crop. While it has evolved over time, the festival remains a deep reflection of the values, customs, and identity of the Mising community, encapsulating a cultural feast that nourishes the soul as much as it does the body.

Celebrated annually on the first Wednesday of the Mising lunar month of Gimur Polo, which falls between February and March, Ali Ai Ligang is a festival that carries great significance for the Mising people. The festival is not just about agriculture, but about honoring the deep connection the community shares with nature. The name "Ali Ai Ligang" itself, meaning the sowing of legumes and seeds, alludes to its agricultural roots, while also emphasizing a larger cultural context where the act of sowing is symbolic of new beginnings, growth, and hope.

The festival begins with a series of rituals that carry with them ancient practices passed down through generations. The first act of the festival is the sowing of the first seeds of the season, a ceremonial moment that signifies the start of the agricultural cycle. This is typically done by the head of each household, often the oldest member, and involves a deep reverence for the land. The ritual is performed with offerings of rice beer (Apong), fish, and rice wrapped in leaves, presented to the deities of nature. Donyi-Polo, the sun-moon deity worshipped by the Mising, is honored in hopes of a bountiful harvest, illustrating the community's dependence on divine blessings for agricultural success. This act of sowing seeds is not merely a mechanical task;

it is an invocation of nature's forces, an acknowledgment of the Mising people's symbiotic relationship with the earth.

However, the cultural significance of Ali Ai Ligang extends far beyond the sowing of crops. The festival is defined by a unique set of customs and restrictions that highlight the community's deep respect for the environment and its cycles. During the festival, certain activities such as plowing, tree-cutting, fishing, and burning are strictly forbidden, as they are believed to disrupt the balance of nature. These prohibitions underscore the Mising people's traditional understanding of ecological balance and their wisdom in preserving the natural world for future generations. The festival becomes a collective reaffirmation of the community's commitment to sustainable practices, reinforcing the importance of maintaining harmony with the environment.

At the heart of Ali Ai Ligang is its cultural vibrancy, which comes alive through music, dance, and communal activities. The Gumrag Soman dance, the central cultural expression of the festival, captures the spirit of Ali Ai Ligang in all its glory. Performed by young men and women dressed in traditional attire, this energetic dance is a depiction of the agricultural cycle, celebrating both the work that goes into cultivating the land and the joy that comes with the harvest. The dancers form circles or lines, moving in unison to the beat of traditional instruments like the dhul (drum), gong, and taal (cymbals). The rhythmic movement of the dance signifies not only the cycle of life and harvest but also the unity of the community. The dance moves from the easternmost house of the village towards the fields, rivers, and significant locations, symbolizing the journey of sowing and the hope of prosperity. This dance is more than just a display of physical coordination; it is a visual representation of the community's collective spirit and shared cultural identity.

Music also plays a pivotal role in Ali Ai Ligang, with the

*The festival begins with a series of rituals that carry with them ancient practices passed down through generations. The first act of the festival is the sowing of the first seeds of the season, a ceremonial moment that signifies the start of the agricultural cycle. This is typically done by the head of each household, often the oldest member, and involves a deep reverence for the land.*

Oi Nitom songs standing as the soul of the festival. These traditional folk songs, passed down through generations, encapsulate the cultural and emotional essence of the Mising people. The lyrics of these songs speak of nature, love, longing, and daily life, offering a window into the worldview of the Mising community. Sung during the festival, the Oi Nitom songs reinforce the deep bond between the Mising people and their environment, celebrating the beauty of nature and the rhythms of life. These songs, performed with great passion and reverence, become a conduit for preserving oral traditions and ensuring that the cultural wisdom of the Mising people is passed on to future generations.

Food, unsurprisingly, is a central component of Ali Ai Ligang, turning the festival into a grand communal feast. The final day of the festival, known as Lilen, is dedicated to feasting, where families and neighbors come together to share a variety of traditional Mising dishes. The dishes prepared during this time, such as Purang Apin (rice wrapped in leaves and boiled), pork, fish, and various other delicacies, reflect the deep connection the Mising people have with their

of the Misings' deep connection with nature, their agricultural roots, and their belief in the divine powers that govern their lives. Through this festival, the Misings reaffirm their cultural identity, celebrating their traditions and religious practices while strengthening their bond with the earth and the community.

Both Me-Dam-Me-Phi and Ali-ai-Ligang play a significant role in the cultural identity of their respective communities. These festivals, deeply embedded in history and tradition, serve as powerful reminders of the unique cultural footprints that the Tai-Ahoms and Misings have left on the land of Assam. They embody the idea that cultural identity is not static but a dynamic process, constantly shaped and reshaped through practice, memory, and history. As Stuart Hall aptly put it, cultural identity is "a matter of becoming as well as of being." It is an ongoing negotiation between the past and the present, between tradition and change.

In the broader context of Assam, these festivals also reflect the convergence of multiple cultural identities within the Assamese society. While the Me-Dam-Me-Phi and Ali-ai-Ligang are uniquely Tai-Ahom and Mising in their essence, they also contribute to the larger mosaic of cultural diversity in the region. The shared practices, rituals, and even the exchange of food and music during these festivals underscore the interconnectedness of the different communities that make up the rich cultural landscape of Assam.

As we continue to navigate the complexities of a globalized world, it is essential to recognize and celebrate the cultural identities of indigenous communities like the Tai-Ahoms and Misings. Festivals like Me-Dam-Me-Phi and Ali-ai-Ligang are not merely celebrations; they are a vital part of the social fabric that keeps these communities grounded in their history, culture, and identity. It is through the preservation and promotion of such traditions that these communities can continue to thrive, ensuring that their cultural heritage remains vibrant and dynamic for generations to come. (The writer can be reached at [dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com](mailto:dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com))

# What causes mood swings in females?

By: Emily Cronkleton

In females, mood swings may occur as part of the typical hormonal fluctuations. They can also be the result of medical conditions that require treatment.

Mood swings are significant changes in mood that come and go within a short space of time. They can happen to anyone, and have a range of causes.

Keep reading to learn more about mood swings in females, including the potential causes, treatments, and how to manage them.

## A note about sex and gender

Sex and gender exist on spectrums. This article will use the terms "male," "female," or both to refer to sex assigned at birth.

## What are mood swings?

Mood swings are significant shifts in a person's emotional state. They can begin suddenly and without warning, and may dissipate just as quickly. They are different from the changes in mood people experience in everyday life.

It is natural for emotions to change over time. Sometimes, they may change rapidly in response to a shocking or upsetting situation. In people with mood swings, though, the change is typically more intense than this, and may be unrelated to life events.

## What could cause mood swings in females?

There are several causes for mood swings that specifically affect females. These include:

### Premenstrual syndrome

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) refers to a group of symptoms that can occur around 1–2 weeks before a period. Over 90% of females experience some premenstrual symptoms, which can include mood swings.

### Other symptoms of PMS include:

- bloating
  - headache
  - tiredness
  - food cravings
  - swollen or tender breasts
  - constipation or diarrhea
  - sleeping more or less than usual
- PMS happens because of the hormonal changes that take place before menstruation, but scientists do not understand why it affects some people more than others.

Some people find that certain types of hormonal birth control help to reduce significant PMS symptoms. But it may require trying several types to find one that helps.

**Premenstrual dysphoric disorder** (PMDD) is a severe premenstrual condition that causes significant irritability, anxiety, or depression 1–2 weeks before a period starts. The symptoms typically get better soon after the period begins.

The symptoms can include:

- mood swings
- feeling angry and short-tempered
- feeling tense or anxious
- a lack of interest in things a person usually enjoys
- trouble focusing
- tiredness
- trouble sleeping
- feelings of despair or suicidal thoughts

Researchers are not sure what causes PMDD, but it may be related to changes in a person's hormones or serotonin levels before a period. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that influences mood and cognition, among other things.

Treatment options include certain types of hormonal birth control or selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors. In severe cases, some may consider inducing early menopause by taking medications, or undergoing surgery.

### Premenstrual symptom exacerbation

Sometimes, people with preexisting mental or physical health conditions find that their symptoms get worse before a period. This is known as premenstrual symptom exacerbation (PME). In those with mental health conditions, PME may cause significant mood changes that are similar to a mood swing.

Examples of conditions that may worsen due to PME include:

- anxiety

- depression
  - eating disorders
  - schizophrenia
  - substance misuse disorders
- PME and PMDD can seem similar, but a crucial difference between them is that with PME, the symptoms of a preexisting mood disorder will be present throughout the hormonal cycle. With PMDD, symptoms only appear between ovulation and menstruation.

This is important, as some treatments for PMDD – such as surgery to remove internal reproductive organs – will not work for PME.

**Pregnancy**

Mood swings are a common sign of pregnancy, and can begin during the first weeks after conception. Other early symptoms of pregnancy include:

- a missed period
- tender or swollen breasts
- tiredness
- food cravings
- nausea
- vomiting (morning sickness)
- heartburn
- more frequent urination

If pregnancy is a possibility, a person should purchase an over-the-counter pregnancy test or speak with a doctor.

### Menopause

Menopause refers to the time when a person's periods naturally stop. The phase before this is perimenopause, when a female's reproductive hormones are starting to decline.

Perimenopause typically begins when someone reaches their early 40s, but it can sometimes start earlier. During this time, estrogen and progesterone levels fluctuate, which can affect the production of serotonin. This can lead to a range of symptoms, including mood swings.

Hormone replacement therapy can boost low levels of estrogen and progesterone, while SSRIs may help to stabilize serotonin levels, which may help with mood. But these medications can have side effects, so it is important to discuss this with a doctor.

A condition known as primary ovarian insufficiency can also cause menopause-like symptoms, such as

mood swings, at a much younger age.

### Other causes

While mood swings can have hormonal causes, there are also a number of other causes that can affect people of any sex. These include:

- **Puberty:** When a person goes through puberty during adolescence, their hormonal levels change considerably. This can cause strong emotions and sudden shifts in mood that are more intense than usual.

- **Mental health conditions:** Some mental health conditions cause mood swings regardless of a person's menstrual cycle. These include borderline personality disorder (BPD), bipolar disorder, and cyclothymia. People with substance misuse disorders may also go through significant changes in mood as a result of using a particular drug, or stopping its use.

- **Neurological conditions:** People can develop mood changes as a result of conditions such as migraine, Parkinson's disease, dementia, and many more.

- **Medications:** Many medications can have a negative impact on mood as a side effect, including some of the drugs doctors use to treat mood-related disorders. Antidepressants, hormonal birth control, and steroids are a few examples. Sometimes the side effects are mild or wear off over time, but some people may find they do not.

Diagnosing the cause of mood swings

It is important to discuss persistent or severe mood swings with a doctor so that they can identify the cause. They will start by asking questions about a person's symptoms and medical history before moving on to diagnostic tests that give them more information.

They may perform:

- a physical examination
- blood tests to rule out common conditions, such as vitamin deficiencies or thyroid conditions
- blood tests to see if a person might be pregnant, or if they are entering perimenopause

If there are signs the cause might be neurological, the doctor may also re-

quest medical imaging tests. If the cause could be part of a mental health condition, a person may benefit from an evaluation with a psychologist.

**Keeping a symptom diary**

Before an appointment, it may help to track mood swings in a diary. This can help doctors understand if the mood swings might be related to the menstrual cycle, or other factors.

Record when the mood swings happen, how long they last, and any other important details, such as stressful events or lack of sleep. Then, track the days when menstruation happens. Continue doing this over several months. People can do this in a notebook or period tracking app.

If mood swings happen more frequently in the fortnight before a period, it may indicate a premenstrual condition such as PMS or PMDD.

**Coping with mood swings**

Mood swings can be disruptive and cause unpleasant feelings. Depending on the cause, it can be possible to reduce the impact they have on a person's daily life and emotional well-being. A person may wish to try:

- **Being self-compassionate:** Sometimes, mood swings are unavoidable, and make someone feel down or irritable for no apparent reason. It may help to remember that this is very common, and that it is not the person's fault that they have them.

- **Practicing mindfulness:** Mindfulness can help someone notice when their emotions change, which may help them to notice mood swings as they appear and fade away. People can practice mindfulness by journaling, through meditation, or by checking in with themselves throughout the day.

- **Avoiding caffeine, alcohol, and smoking:** Caffeine and alcohol can both worsen PMS and menopause symptoms. People who smoke also experience more severe PMS symptoms compared with those who do not smoke.

- **Getting enough sleep:** Where possible, try to maintain a regular sleep schedule. A lack of sleep can worsen irritability, anxiety, depression, and fa-

tigue (low energy).

- **Trying relaxation techniques:** Relaxation can reduce stress and improve sleep, which both have a positive impact on mood. Examples to try include breathing exercises, yoga, tai chi, or massage.

- **Staying active:** Physical activity increases the production of hormones that can boost a person's mood.

- **Doing enjoyable activities:** Try to continue activities that are enjoyable, even if a mood swing is making it more difficult. Spending time in nature, creative hobbies, gardening, and listening to music can have a positive impact on well-being.

### When to speak with a doctor

While mild or moderate mood swings are common in females who experience PMS, they should not be long-lasting, occur throughout the month, or significantly affect a person's ability to function. Mood swings that do may be a sign of another condition that requires medical attention.

It is important to speak with a doctor about mood swings, particularly if they are new, severe, or persistent. If mood swings are impacting a person's mental health, the person may also benefit from speaking with a therapist.

If mood swings are causing a person to have suicidal thoughts, they should speak with a doctor or mental health professional as soon as possible.

Do not alter types or doses of prescription medications before speaking with a doctor.

### Summary

Mood swings are short-term emotional shifts that are more intense than the typical changes people experience in daily life. They can have a significant impact on a person's quality of life.

Mood swings in females can be the result of PMS, PMDD, PME, pregnancy, and menopause. Females can also experience mood swings as a result of conditions that affect all sexes, such as mental health conditions. A doctor can diagnose the cause and recommend treatments. (Courtesy: *Medical News Today*)

## Home remedies for teeth whitening

By: Shahnaz Husain

Everyone desires dazzling white teeth as it adds to our beauty. In fact, with sparkling white teeth, you can meet and greet others with confidence.

When you meet someone, the most natural reaction is to greet them with a smile. It plays an important role in the impression we make on others.

Teeth become darker or yellow with growing age as the outer enamel wears away, and the yellowish dentin underneath becomes more visible.

Maintaining a bright, white smile doesn't always require expensive treatments or harsh chemicals. Nature provides us with plenty of remedies that can effectively keep our teeth looking their best. Some natural, at-home remedies are safe and can whiten your teeth.

So, here look at some great ways to achieve sparkling white teeth naturally.

### 1. Baking Soda:

Using baking soda is one of the most effective teeth-whitening home remedies. Baking soda, also known as sodium bicarbonate, prevents bacteria from growing in your mouth because of its alkaline properties.

Baking soda can gently polish away stains on the surface of the teeth. Its alkaline and coarse nature will mildly scrub stains off your teeth and return your mouth's pH to normal levels.

You can make a simple paste by mixing baking soda with a small amount of water and brushing your teeth with it a few times a week.

Take one tablespoon of baking soda and two tablespoons of hydrogen peroxide. Mix both to make a paste. Use this paste to brush your teeth.

Brush your teeth with baking soda mixed with Coconut oil enough to cre-



ate a paste. This can make good homemade toothpaste.

Mix one teaspoon of baking soda with fresh lemon juice to form a paste. Apply the paste to your toothbrush and gently brush your teeth for about two minutes. Rinse thoroughly with water afterwards. The acidity of the lemon juice can erode the enamel if used excessively. Many toothpastes contain baking soda. You can alternatively sprinkle a little bit of baking soda on your toothbrush before you brush your teeth to help whiten them.

It must be used carefully as its overuse can also erode our tooth enamel; however, besides its benefits, it also has various disadvantages. It can damage your gums if used daily or if left in contact with your teeth for a long time.

Just be sure not to use it too frequently, as excessive abrasion can damage tooth enamel.

### 2. Oil Pulling

Oil pulling is the term for washing the mouth with oil to remove dirt, bacteria, and debris

Oil pulling is an ancient Ayurvedic remedy practised worldwide to prevent and treat cavities, benefit oral health, improve gums, and whiten teeth. This technique is also meant to improve overall oral health and hygiene.

All you need is 2 tablespoons of coconut oil, sesame oil, or sunflower oil. Pour it in your teeth and swish it for over a few minutes in your mouth along with cool water and then spit it out. For the best results, do this practice daily. Make sure to pull the oil through your teeth and around your gums.

As part of this method, oil is used as a mouthwash. People started using this method thousands of years ago. It is suggested to use this method in the morning.

### 3. Activated charcoal

Activated charcoal is highly absorbent and can help lift surface stains from the teeth. Charcoal has activated carbon which is known to absorb water impurities. It is also known as a cleansing agent for tooth surfaces that have cracks.

Activated charcoal can remove tannins, which are present in most of the food items we eat.

Mix 1 teaspoon of charcoal powder and a pea-sized amount of toothpaste to make a mixture. Brush your teeth with it. You can do this twice a day or at least once.

Wet your toothbrush and dip it into activated charcoal powder. Brush your teeth gently for 2 minutes. Rinse thoroughly afterwards to remove any residue.

Mix activated charcoal with a small amount of water to make a mouthwash. Swish this solution for 2 minutes and then spit it out. Rinse your mouth thoroughly with water after using activated charcoal.

### 4. Peels

Peels are also good for getting sparkling white teeth. Just rub the inside of an orange, banana and lemon peel on your teeth for two minutes. Make sure to thoroughly rinse out your mouth and brush your teeth afterwards.

You should repeat this process two to three times a week. After a few weeks, you will be able to see results.

Dip your toothbrush in water and then in the orange peel powder. Brush your teeth gently for 2 minutes. Rinse thoroughly with water.

You can also dry the orange peels and grind them into a powder to add it to your daily teeth-cleaning ritual. The peels of these fruits contain citric acid, which theoretically helps in teeth whitening. Banana peels contain manganese, magnesium, and potassium that help whiten your teeth.

If you're having sensitivity issues, in that case, it's not recommended to use this remedy. (The author is an international fame beauty expert and is called the herbal queen of India)

## Lonely brains reach for comfort food: Study links loneliness and cravings in women

By: Rohini Krishnamurthy

Researchers have revealed a connection between loneliness in women and brain activity linked to cravings for high-calorie foods. A new study has suggested that feelings of isolation may trigger responses in the brain that promote unhealthy eating patterns.

Previous beliefs have linked binge eating to emotional coping mechanisms, particularly for women. This new study provides a neurological basis for that connection, underlining that loneliness goes beyond emotional well-being and can demonstrably influence eating habits.

Researchers observed increased activity in brain regions associated with cravings and motivation to eat when women feeling lonely viewed images of calorie dense foods.

Conversely, brain activity in areas related to self-control over eating behaviours decreased among women who reported feeling lonely, found the study published in the medical journal JAMA. These women also reported poor mental health.

"While it is established that obesity is linked to depression and anxiety and that binge-eating is understood to be a coping mechanism against loneliness, I wanted to observe the brain pathways associated with these feelings and behaviours," the author of the

paper, Arpana Gupta, told Down To Earth. Gupta is a PhD, a researcher and co-director of the University of California, Los Angeles Goodman-Luskin Microbiome Center.

The study focused on women, as men and women have different brain patterns when it comes to obesity and also different coping mechanisms regarding loneliness, according to Gupta.

Women tend to gain more weight post dieting, have different eating patterns, show greater obesity-related complications and comorbidities and face more difficulties implementing weight loss treatments in the long term, according to her. "So it made sense to look at women first," she added.

Gupta and her colleagues recruited 93 women for the study. They were quizzed about their support system and if they were lonely or socially isolated.

Based on the responses, the participants were separated into two groups: Those who scored high on the social isolation scale and those who scored low.

Women who reported facing higher levels of social isolation also tended to have higher fat mass, lower diet quality, greater cravings, reward-based eating, and uncontrolled eating, with increased levels of anxiety and depression.

Next, the team deployed a scanning tool called magnetic resonance imaging to record images of the

brain when the participants were shown pictures of food versus non-food, sweet food versus non-food and savoury food versus non-food.

Their analysis showed increased activation in regions of the brain associated with greater cravings to eat sugary foods among women who reported feeling lonely and lesser activity in the brain region associated with self-control.

"We were able to show that brain alterations may be a key link between social isolation and various outcomes, extending beyond eating behaviours and obesity to encompass mental health symptoms," Gupta noted.

Social isolation, she highlighted, could cause food cravings similar to those for social connections.

The study presents evidence that our social bonds are key to how eating unhealthy foods, especially highly calorie-dense foods (sweets), impacts our cravings, mental wellbeing and overall quality of life, she added.

Gupta said her team is hoping to investigate if men's brains also show activation in the same region of the brain as women in response to loneliness.

The team also plans to analyse other biological markers, such as inflammation and gut microbiome, and other outcomes, such as sleep. It then plans to develop intervention studies to mitigate the negative effects of these outcomes. (Courtesy: *Down to Earth*)

## Saving the planet shouldn't mean making life harder for women

By: Anjali Roongta

Let's cut to the chase.

Everyone knows, and numbers show, that it's mostly women bearing the brunt of environmental work. Despite not getting any formal acknowledgement of positions, most of women are present in the conversation and making active choices to be more sustainable and eco-friendly.

Yet, their comforts and needs are forgotten in the conversation, to the extent that they're shamed on Instagram and YouTube for not being sustainable enough. It's the age-old "perfect environmentalist" trap where we shift the focus on consumers and how they're not doing enough, thus looking away from the industries and systems that make living an eco-friendly life a nightmare.

But why am I specifically talking about women?

Because of the way the "sustainability community" looks at menstruation.

Let's see what the discourse is. Now, many creators do approach this issue sensitively, but some do not. We are talking about them.

1. If you care about the environment you won't use disposable period products.

Yes, sure they've chemicals that some argue are bad for health, but how much do we hear about that as opposed to hearing about plastic in landfills and pads? Or how...

2. Using a menstrual cup is one of the easier eco-friendly swaps.

Except when it's not. The same goes for cloth pads.

Menstrual cups work in cultures where women are taught autonomy and how to use them. Not in places like India where the concept of virginity and menstrual shame are predominant, leading to cases where women get hurt because they can't pick the right-sized cup. And let's not forget – what about those with vaginismus? Or those without access to clean water to clean the cup after every use?

The problems don't stop at the cup. For cloth pads, proper cleaning can be a cultural issue, especially dialing them in the sun. Moreover,

cloth pads are tough to secure and one of the most freeing things for women was the ability to not be ruled by their flow. Should we take away women's freedoms to work and play and call it environmentalism?

While promoting these swaps is important, why not also highlight organizations like PadCare which are trying to make single-use pads eco-friendly at the end of their life-cycle and reduce the plight of waste workers who have to dispose of them?

This is similar to the plastic straw problem. The problem isn't that cups and cloth pads and such alternatives exist or that they're encouraged. They should be. In an ideal world, we would all have access to the most eco-friendly products that work for us.

But in the real world, when we demonize something a group needs, especially an oppressed group, we end up harming or alienating that group. Just like some disabled people need plastic straws and an all-out ban will negatively affect their quality of life, the same happens when we shame women for disposable period products without a nuanced look at their circumstances. Or when companies try to take advantage of that to make fake eco-friendly products. For there are easy-to-use alternatives, but in the sea of products and greenwashing, they rarely reach their target at the right time.

Can we come to a point where we educate, encourage, and help people use more eco-swaps without making life tougher for those who need disposable options? And also innovate better options that serve a wider group of people while not destroying our planet.

More importantly, instead of attacking those who are making an effort, maybe even the bulk of the effort, can we move to a point where we are holding systems, governments, and major polluters accountable for excess and unnecessary pollution and ecological damage?

Just a thought. After all, what do I know? I'm yet another woman trying to keep a habitable planet a reality. (Courtesy: *Youth Ki Awaaz*)

## Top Russian, US officials meet for talks on Ukraine war without Kyiv

**RIYADH, Feb 18:** Senior officials from Russia and the US met in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday to begin talks on improving ties and negotiating an end to the war in Ukraine.

Delegations led by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met at the Diriyah Palace in Riyadh. The meeting marks another pivotal step by the Trump administration to reverse US policy on isolating Russia and is meant to pave the way for a meeting between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Trump earlier this month updated US policy toward Ukraine and Russia by saying he and Putin had agreed to begin negotiations on ending the war.

Ukrainian officials aren't taking part in the meeting, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Monday that his country won't accept the outcome if Kyiv doesn't take part.

Rubio was accompanied by US national security adviser Mike Waltz and Special Envoy Steve Witkoff, while Lavrov sat next to the Kremlin's foreign affairs adviser, Yuri Ushakov. Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan and national security adviser Musaed al Alban joined Rubio, Lavrov and others for the start of the meeting but were expected to leave early in the talks.

Ushakov said Monday the talks would be "purely bilateral" and would not include Ukrainian officials.

The talks mark a significant expansion of US-Russian contacts nearly three years into a war that has seen ties fall to the lowest level in decades.

Lavrov and then-US Secretary of State Antony Blinken talked briefly on the sidelines of a G-20 meeting in India nearly two years ago, and in the fall of 2022, US and Russian spymasters met in Türkiye



amid Washington's concerns that Moscow could resort to nuclear weapons amid battlefield setbacks. The recent US diplomatic blitz on the war has sent Kyiv and key allies scrambling to ensure a seat at the table amid concerns that Washington and Moscow could press ahead with a deal that won't be favourable to them.

France called an emergency meeting of European Union countries and the UK on Monday to decide how to respond.

French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday said he spoke by phone to Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelenskyy following the meeting.

"We seek a strong and lasting peace in Ukraine," Macron wrote on X. "To achieve this, Russia must end its aggression, and this must be accompanied by strong and credible security guarantees for the Ukrainians," he said and vowed to "work on this together with all Europeans, Americans, and Ukrainians."

Ahead of the talks, Kirill Dmitriev, the head of the Russian Direct Investment Fund who the Kremlin said might join the talks, underscored the importance of the meeting in comments to The Associated Press.

"Good US-Russia relations are very important for the whole world. Only jointly can Russia and the US address lots of world problems, resolve for global conflicts and offer solutions," Dmitriev, who said he and his team would focus on economic issues at the talks, told AP. (AP)

## Vietnam's strict new social media regulations strangle free speech, says human rights group

**BANGKOK, Feb 18:** New government regulations on social media in Vietnam give authorities increased powers to prevent dissent and control the news, along with the tools to more easily track down critics and silence them, according to an analysis released Tuesday.

Vietnam's authorities implemented "Decree 147" in December, tightening regulations on social media companies like Facebook, X, YouTube and TikTok in a bid to further stifle criticism, said Ben Swanton, one of the authors of the report by The 88 Project, a group focused on human rights and free speech issues in Vietnam.

"Any challenge to the government and the Communist Party, any significant challenge to their official narrative of events, is perceived by them as a situation that is getting out of control," he said in an interview from Thailand.

Among other things, the decree requires users to verify their accounts with phone numbers or national ID cards that must be provided to the government upon request, and for the social media companies to store their data in Vietnam.

It also prevents social media users from engaging in citizen journalism or posting information about suspected government wrongdoing,

and requires companies to remove posts deemed illegal within 24 hours. The decree requires companies to allow authorities access to their internal search engines so that it can identify offending content.

Social media companies have until late March to be in compliance, and it is not yet clear whether they will try to push back. TikTok and Facebook refused to comment on their plans, while X and Google, which owns YouTube, did not return emails. Already, however, researchers have noticed a decline in political posts, Swanton said.

"In the last several years Hanoi has imprisoned or forced into exile the country's most prominent independent journalists, reformers, human rights activists, and dissidents. This has had a chilling effect that encourages people to engage in self-censorship," he said. "Decree 147 is designed to turn this chilling effect into an icy stranglehold on free speech."

Vietnamese authorities did not respond to a request for comment on the Project 88 analysis or the intent behind the new decree.

Authorities tighten the screws on critical reporting About 65 million Vietnamese have Facebook accounts, roughly two-thirds of the population, and some 35 million have YouTube accounts. (AP)

## Villagers in southern Lebanon prepare to return home as Israeli army withdraws under ceasefire deal

**DEIR MIMAS (LEBANON), Feb 18:** Israeli forces withdrew from border villages in southern Lebanon on Tuesday, under a deadline spelled out in a US-brokered ceasefire agreement that ended the latest Israel-Hezbollah war.

Lebanese soldiers moved into the areas from where the Israeli troops pulled out and began clearing roadblocks set up by Israeli forces and checking for unexploded ordnance. They blocked the main road leading to the villages, preventing anyone from entering while the military was looking for any explosives left behind.

Most of the villages waited by the roadside for permission to go and check on their homes but some pushed aside the roadblocks to march in. Many of their houses were demolished during the more than year-long conflict or in the two months after November's ceasefire agreement when Israeli forces were still occupying the area.

The Israeli troops, however, have remained in five strategic overlook points inside Lebanon — a sore point with Lebanese officials and the militant Hezbollah group, who



have maintained that Israel is required to make a full withdrawal by Tuesday.

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said the Israeli army "will stay in a buffer zone in Lebanon in five control posts" to guard against any ceasefire violations by Hezbollah. He also said the army had erected new posts on the Israeli side of the border and sent reinforcements there.

"We are determined to provide full security to every northern community," Katz said.

For the first time since October

# Delta jet flips upside down on snowy Toronto runway, all 80 aboard survive

**TORONTO, Feb 18:** A Delta Air Lines jet flipped on its roof while landing Monday at Toronto's Pearson Airport, but all 80 people on board survived and those hurt had relatively minor injuries, the airport's chief executive said.

Snow blown by winds gusting to 40 mph (65 kph) swirled when the flight from Minneapolis carrying 76 passengers and four crew attempted to land at around 2:15 pm. Communications between the tower and pilot were normal on approach and it's not clear what went so drastically wrong when the plane touched down.

Peter Carlson, a passenger travelling to Toronto for a paramedics conference, said the landing was "very forceful."

"All the sudden everything just kind of went sideways and then next thing I know it's kind of a blink and I'm upside down still strapped in," he told CBC News.

Canadian authorities held two brief news conferences but provided no details on the crash. Video posted to social media showed the aftermath with the Mitsubishi CRJ-900LR overturned, the fuselage seemingly intact and firefighters dousing what was left of the fire as passengers climbed out and walked across the tarmac.

"We are very grateful there was no loss of life and relatively minor



injuries," Deborah Flint, CEO of Greater Toronto Airports Authority, told reporters.

Delta CEO Ed Bastian said in a statement that "the hearts of the entire global Delta family are with those affected."

Toronto Pearson Fire Chief Todd Aitken said 18 passengers were taken to the hospital. Earlier in the day, Ornge air ambulance said it was transporting one pediatric patient to Toronto's SickKids hospital and two injured adults to other hospitals in the city.

Emergency personnel reached the plane within a few minutes and Aitken said the response "went as planned." He said "the runway was dry and there was no cross-wind conditions."

The crash was the fourth major

aviation accident in North America in the past three weeks. A commercial jetliner and an Army helicopter collided near Reagan National Airport in Washington, DC, on January 29, killing 67 people.

A medical transportation plane crashed in Philadelphia on January 31, killing the six people on board and another person on the ground. And on February 6, 10 people were killed in a plane crash in Alaska.

The last major crash at Pearson was on August 2, 2005, when an Airbus A340 landing from Paris skidded off the runway and burst into flames amid stormy weather. All 309 passengers and crew aboard Air France Flight 358 survived the crash.

On Monday, Pearson was expe-

riencing blowing snow and winds of 32 mph (51 kph) gusting to 40 mph (65 kph), according to the Meteorological Service of Canada. The temperature was about 16.5 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 8.6 degrees Celsius).

The Delta flight was cleared to land at about 2:10 pm. Audio recordings show the control tower warned the pilots of a possible air flow "bump" on the approach.

"It sounds to me like a controller trying to be helpful, meaning the wind is going to give you a bumpy ride coming down, that you're going to be up and down through the glide path," said John Cox, CEO of aviation safety consulting firm Safety Operating Systems in St. Petersburg, Florida.

"So it was windy. But the airplanes are designed and certified to handle that," Cox said. "The pilots are trained and experienced to handle that."

The plane came to a rest at the intersection of Runways 23 and 15L, not far from the start of the runway. Just after the crash, tower controllers spoke with the crew of a medical helicopter that had just left Pearson and was returning to help.

"Just so you're aware, there's people outside walking around the aircraft there," a controller said. "Yeah, we've got it. The aircraft

is upside down and burning," the medical helicopter pilot responded.

Carlson was among those outside the aircraft. He said when he took off his seat belt he crashed onto the ceiling, which had become the floor. He smelled gas, saw aviation fuel cascading down the cabin windows and knew he needed to get out but said his fatherly intuition and paramedic skills kicked in. He looked for those he could help.

Carlson and another man assisted a mother and her young son out of the plane and then Carlson dropped onto the tarmac. Snow was blowing and it "felt like I was stepping onto tundra."

"I didn't care how cold it was, didn't care how far I had to walk, how long I had to stand — all of us just wanted to be out of the aircraft," he said.

Cox, who flew for US Air for 25 years and has worked on US National Transportation Safety Board investigations, said the CRJ-900 aircraft is a proven aircraft that's been in service for decades and does a good job of handling inclement weather.

He said it's unusual for a plane to end up on its roof.

"We've seen a couple of cases of takeoffs where airplanes have ended up inverted, but it's pretty rare," Cox said. (AP)

## North Korea slams US, Asian rivals for pursuing 'absurd' plans to denuclearise North

**SEOUL, Feb 18:** North Korea on Tuesday criticised the United States and Asian neighbours for pursuing the "absurd" goal of denuclearising the North and said it will push to expand its nuclear forces under the direction of its authoritarian leader Kim Jong Un.

The statement by Pyongyang's Foreign Ministry came after the top diplomats of the US, South Korea and Japan met at a security conference in Germany and reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening military cooperation and reinforcing an international sanctions regime to counter Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions.

The North Korean ministry accused the US of trying to realise an "outdated and absurd plan" of denuclearising the North and warned of "overwhelming and decisive counteraction" against its rivals if it perceives its security is under threat.

It said the North will "consistently adhere to the new line of bolstering the nuclear force" estab-

lished by Kim and "thoroughly deter the US and its vassal forces" from threats and blackmail against the North's sovereignty.

It was the latest North Korean statement to wind down its policy against Pyongyang, though state media has so far avoided directly naming US President Donald Trump, who, during his first term, engaged in unprecedented summits with the North Korean leader.

US Secretary of State Mark Rubio held a three-way meeting with the South Korean and Japanese foreign ministers in Munich, Germany, on Saturday and reaffirmed their commitment to the North's "complete denuclearisation" and maintaining an effective sanctions regime targeting the country's weapons programme.

The countries also agreed to bolster defence and deterrence, including by expanding three-way military exercises and strengthening Japan and South Korea's military capabilities, according to a

joint statement released after the meeting.

**Likely no quick fix under Trump**

Trump and Kim met three times in 2018 and 2019 during Trump's first term, but their diplomacy quickly collapsed over disagreements about exchanging the release of US-led sanctions for North Korean steps to wind down its nuclear and missile programmes.

North Korea has since suspended any meaningful talks with Washington and Seoul as Kim ramped up his testing activity and military demonstrations to counter what he portrayed as "gangster-like US threats."

Kim's foreign policy priority is now Russia, which he has supplied with weapons and troops to help prolong Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine. Seoul fears that Kim may receive economic assistance and advanced technology to develop his arsenal in exchange for his military supporting Russia. (AP)

## Trump begins firings of FAA staff just weeks after fatal DC plane crash

**WASHINGTON, Feb 18:** The Trump administration has begun firing several hundred Federal Aviation Administration employees, upending staff on a busy air travel weekend and just weeks after a January fatal collision at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport.

Probationary workers were targeted in late-night emails on Friday notifying them they had been fired, David Spero, president of the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists union, said in a statement.

The impacted workers include personnel hired for FAA radar, landing and navigational aid maintenance, one air traffic controller told AP. The air traffic controller was not authorised to talk to the media and spoke on condition of anonymity.

A Transportation Department official told AP late on Monday that no air traffic controllers were affected by the cuts, and that the agency has "retained employees who perform critical safety functions". In a follow-up query the agency said they would have to look into whether the radar, landing and navigational aid workers affected were considered to handle critical safety functions.

The National Air Traffic Controllers Association said in a brief statement on Monday it was "analysing the effect of the reported federal employee terminations on aviation safety, the national airspace system and our members".

Other FAA employees who were fired were working on an urgent and classified early warning radar system the Air Force had announced in 2023 for Hawaii to detect incoming cruise

missiles, through a programme that was in part funded by the Defense Department. It's one of several programmes that the FAA's National Defense Program manages that involve radars providing longer-range detection around the country's borders.

Due to the nature of their work, staff in that office typically provide an extensive knowledge transfer before retiring to make sure no institutional knowledge is lost, said Charles Spitzer-Stradtlander, one of the employees in that branch who was terminated.

The Hawaii radar and the FAA National Defense Program office working on it are "about protecting national security", Spitzer-Stradtlander said. "I don't think they even knew what NDP does, they just thought, oh no big deal, he just works for the FAA." (AP)

## European leaders want say in talks to end Russia's war in Ukraine

**PARIS, Feb 18:** European leaders insisted on Monday their governments must have a say in talks between the US and Russia to end the war in Ukraine, as both Moscow and Washington said there was no role for Europe in the negotiations that could shape the future of the continent.

Leaders of Germany, the UK, Italy, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark, NATO and the European Union met for over three hours at the Elysee Palace in Paris for emergency talks on Europe's security quandary after a US diplomatic blitz on Ukraine which has thrown a once-solid alliance into turmoil.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer called for US backing while reaffirming he's ready to consider sending British forces on the Ukrainian ground alongside others "if there is a lasting peace agreement".

"There must be a US backstop, because a US security guarantee is the only way to effectively deter Russia from attacking Ukraine again," Starmer said after the meeting. Many EU nations are still undecided about whether to send troops while some are opposed.

Top US officials from the Trump administration, on their first visit

to Europe last week, left the impression that Washington was ready to embrace the Kremlin while it cold-shouldered many of its age-old European allies.

Gen Keith Kellogg, Trump's special envoy for Ukraine and Russia, said he didn't think it was "reasonable and feasible to have everybody sitting at the table".

"We know how that can turn out and that has been our point, is keeping it clean and fast as we can," he told reporters in Brussels, where he briefed the 31 US allies in NATO, along with EU officials, before heading to Kyiv for talks on Wednesday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

His remarks were echoed by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who was equally dismissive about a role for Europe.

Last week, Vice-President JD Vance and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth in a flurry of speeches questioned both Europe's security commitments and its fundamental democratic principles.

French President Emmanuel Macron, who has long championed a stronger European defence, said their stinging rebukes and threats of non-cooperation in the face of military danger felt like a shock to the system. (AP)

## Chinese navy helicopter flies within 10 feet of Philippine patrol plane over disputed shoal

**SOUTH CHINA SEA, Feb 18:** A Chinese navy helicopter flew within 10 feet (3 metres) of a Philippine patrol plane on Tuesday in a disputed area of the South China Sea, prompting the Filipino pilot to warn by radio: "You are flying too close, you are very dangerous."

The Chinese helicopter was attempting to force a Cessna Caravan turboprop plane belonging to the Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources out of what China claims is its airspace over the hotly disputed Scarborough Shoal off the northwestern Philippines.

An Associated Press journalist and other invited foreign media on the plane witnessed the tense 30-minute standoff as the Philippine plane pressed on with its low-altitude patrol around Scarborough with the Chinese navy helicopter hovering close above it or flying to its left in cloudy weather.

"You are flying too close, you are very dangerous and endanger-

ing the lives of our crew and passengers," the Philippine pilot told the Chinese navy helicopter by radio at one point. "Keep away and distance your aircraft from us, you are violating the safety standard set by FAA and ICAO."

The pilot was referring to the standard distance between aircraft required by the US Federal Aviation Administration and the International Civil Aviation Organisation to prevent air disasters. There was no sign that the Philippine plane had to alter its planned path and altitude to avoid a collision.

The Philippine Coast Guard and the Bureau of Fisheries said in a statement that they remain "committed to asserting our sovereignty, sovereign rights and maritime jurisdiction in the West Philippine Sea, despite the aggressive and escalatory actions of China".

They referred to the Philippine name for the stretch of waters in the South China Sea closer to the Philippines' western coast. (AP)

## Huawei's tri-foldable phone hits global markets in show of defiance amid US curbs

**KUALA LUMPUR (MALAYSIA), Feb 18:** Huawei on Tuesday held a global launch for the industry's first tri-foldable phone, which analysts said marked a symbolic victory for the Chinese tech giant amid US technology curbs. But challenges over pricing, longevity, supply and app constraints may limit its success.

Huawei said at a launch event in Kuala Lumpur that the Huawei Mate XT, first unveiled in China five months ago, will be priced at 3,499 euros (USD 3,662).

Although dubbed a tri-fold, the phone has three mini-panels and folds only twice. The company says it's the thinnest foldable phone at 3.6 millimetres (0.14 inches), with a 10.2-inch screen similar to an Apple iPad.

"Right now, Huawei kind of stands alone as an innovator" with the tri-fold design, said Bryan Ma, vice president of device research with the market intelligence firm International Data Corporation.

Huawei reached the position despite "not getting access to chips, to Google services. All these things basically have been huge roadblocks in front of Huawei", Ma said, adding that the "resurgence we're seeing from them over the past year has been quite a bit of a victory".

Huawei, China's first global tech brand, is at the centre of a US-China battle over trade and technology. Washington in 2019 severed Huawei's access to US components and technology, including Google's music and other smartphone services, making Huawei's phone less appealing to users. It has also barred global vendors from using US technology to produce components for Huawei.

American officials say Huawei is a security risk, which the company denies. China's government has accused Washington of misusing security warnings to contain a rising competitor to US technology companies. (AP)

# Centre focused on integrating Northeast into development journey of country: Union min

### Minister lauds the Union budget noting its significant provisions for boosting various sectors

**KOHIMA, Feb 18:** Union Minister of State Kirti Vardhan Singh on Tuesday said that the Centre has been focused on integrating Northeast into the development journey of the country.

Addressing reporters during his maiden visit to the Northeast starting with Nagaland, Singh, who is MoS for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, asserted that the region plays a vital role in India's overall development and reaffirmed the government's commitment to fostering growth and improving connectivity.



"Since the current government came to power, efforts to uplift the Northeast have gained momentum, with a focus on improving infrastructure and ensuring the region's alignment with the growth of the national economy," he said.

The minister lauded the Union budget, noting its significant provisions for boosting various sectors

such as agriculture, small-scale industries, defence production and employment.

"The budget reflects the aspirations of the Indian people and the vision of a developed and self-reliant India by 2047," Singh said, while also pointing out the emphasis on agricultural reforms, quality

education, and women's empowerment, as well as efforts to raise productivity through improved infrastructure, particularly in roadways, railways, and air connectivity.

Addressing questions about the Northeast, the Union MoS acknowledged the historical challenges regarding infrastructure and

connectivity in the region. However, he highlighted recent efforts under the UDAN scheme, which has significantly improved air connectivity, as well as new railway stations and expanded road networks. He promised continued development to address the region's infrastructural needs.

On the issue of services at Dimapur railway station, where the number of trains has been reduced, the minister said that the expansion of regional stations and highways had led to some adjustments in train routes. He also assured of looking into issues of removing trains originating from Dimapur.

Regarding the long-delayed second airport project in Nagaland, at state capital Kohima, the minister acknowledged the difficulties in progressing with the airport development but assured that 50 new airports, with a focus on Northeast

India, were planned in the current budget. He said he would take up the matter with the authorities concerned to push for timely resolution.

Touching upon concerns about the re-imposition of Protected Area Regime (PAR), particularly affecting foreign tourists visiting the state, the MoS noted that although this would impose some restrictions on foreign visitors, the government was working on ensuring that special passes be issued to ease their access.

The initiative, he clarified, was part of the Home Ministry's broader security measures. The minister expressed strong support for the region's eco-tourism potential. He pointed out that the vast natural beauty of the Northeast, particularly its forests, mountains, and rich environment, could attract global tourists. (PTI)

# Understanding of country's diverse cultures necessary for national integration: Nagaland Gov

**KOHIMA, Feb 18:** Maintaining that India is a land of unparalleled beauty, rich traditions, and diverse cultures, Nagaland Governor La Ganesan on Tuesday called upon all to understand and appreciate each other's differences for national integration. Ganesan was addressing a programme after the conclusion of the National Integration Tour (NIT) for 20 participants at the Kohima Garrison of Assam Rifles.

"India is a land of unparalleled beauty, rich traditions, and diverse cultures. As citizens of this great nation, it is important that we understand and appreciate each other's differences while celebrating our shared values," Ganesan said.

Addressing 16 students and four teachers from different schools, who participated in the NIT organised by the Assam Rifles from February 4 to 18, the governor hoped the tour had shown them how such interactions and experiences can foster mutual respect, understanding, and unity among people.

During the tour the participants visited Mumbai, Pune and Goa.

"These experiences have not only broadened your horizons but

also instilled in you a deep sense of pride and appreciation for our nation's rich heritage and vibrant present," the governor said.

He encouraged more students and teachers to join such initiatives in the future, saying that such tours are not just about travelling but about building bridges, forging friendships, and nurturing a sense of national pride and unity.

"It is through such initiatives that we can truly understand and appreciate the diversity that defines our nation and work towards a future where harmony and understanding prevail," Ganesan added.

The governor further appealed to all to strive to be ambassadors of peace, unity, and integration and to work towards building a nation united in its diversity.

Acknowledging the Assam Rifles for their commitment to promoting national integration through such tours, Ganesan congratulated the Assam Rifles, the teachers, and the students for the success of this NIT.

He expressed confidence that the lessons learned and the memories created during the tour would inspire all to work towards a more united and integrated India. (PTI)

# Tripura opposition MLAs skip meeting on centrally sponsored schemes

**AGARTALA, Feb 18:** Tripura opposition MLAs on Tuesday boycotted a review meeting on centrally sponsored schemes held at West Tripura District Magistrate's conference hall.

However, all BJP MLAs from the district attended the District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committee (DISHA) meeting chaired by West Tripura MP Biplob Kumar Deb.

Responding to the absence of Congress and CPI(M) legislators, Deb remarked, "They didn't attend the important district-level review meeting on nearly 47 central government-sponsored schemes. They are a different species and are on the verge of extinction."

He added, "By sheer luck, the CPI(M) managed to win two or three Assembly seats with Congress's help. But due to their un-constitutional attitude, they will eventually disappear."

Senior Congress MLA Sudip Roy Barman ridiculed the meeting, questioning its effectiveness.

"How can he (Biplab Kumar

Deb) show 'disha' (direction) when he himself is 'dishahen' (aimless)?" he quipped.

"These meetings do not facilitate any meaningful discussion. There's no point in attending just for refreshments. I don't waste my time on such meetings," Roy Barman added.

CPI(M) legislator Nayan Sarkar cited urgent constituency work in Bamunia as reason for his absence.

He alleged that BJP legislators were obstructing the execution of projects under the MLA Area Development Fund (MLAADF) in his constituency.

"They (BJP) are not allowing us to execute works under MLAADF in my home constituency. I have written to the chief secretary and the district magistrate about it but no action has been taken. The genuine poor people are deprived of government benefits," he claimed.

Meanwhile, Congress MLA Gopal Chandra Roy said he skipped the meeting because the authorities had not provided him with the agenda beforehand. (PTI)

# Two arrested in Manipur, arms recovered

**IMPHAL, Feb 18:** Security forces arrested one active cadre of the proscribed Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA) and another person carrying unaccounted cash of more than ₹ 34 lakhs from Manipur's Imphal East and Churachandpur districts respectively, police said on Tuesday.

The PLA cadre was apprehended from Khongman Mangil in Imphal East district on Monday, police said.

The arrested man was allegedly involved in extortion of money from government officials, schools, colleges and general public. In another operation, security forces arrested one person while checking at Sangai University located near Kaparung village in Churachandpur district, police said.

An amount of ₹ 34,20,000 in unaccounted cash, two soap cases containing 24 grams of suspected brown sugar, were recovered from his possession on Monday.

Meanwhile, security forces recovered one automatic rifle with magazine, three country-made pull mechanism rifle, one single barrel bolt action rifle, one .32 pistol with magazine, one .22 pistol with magazine, one mortar and five mortar bombs from T Khullen village in Kangpokpi District on Monday, police said. (PTI)

# Conrad Sangma urges voters to reject divisive politics

**SHILLONG, Feb 18:** National People's Party (NPP) chief and Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Tuesday urged voters to reject parties that are trying to communalize the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC) elections, scheduled for February 21.

"The upcoming election is an opportunity to give a befitting response to parties that are trying to divide our people," he said while addressing an election meeting at Dangar under the Mawsynram constituency. "We should reject and vote-out parties that are trying to divide our people."

"We have to be strong against divisive politics and vote out parties that are trying to create rifts and divide our people," he underscored.

He stated that voting is the constitutional right of the people and asserted that there is no intention to disallow any indigenous people from exercising their voting rights or to deny minority tribes in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills council elections.

He also campaigned at Cherrakata, Pataghat, and Mawsynram to drum up support for the party's candidate, Alvin Sawkmie.

Reminding on the promises delivered after the 2019 KHADC election, particularly in the India-Bangladesh border region of Meghalaya, he said "We have identified the problems faced by our people living in the border area and have initiated interventions to ensure development and promote the welfare of the people."

"People living in the border area have been neglected for a long time, but we have fulfilled our assurance to construct the Balat-Dangar-Ryngku road, which was promised during the 2019 KHADC election", he added.

The chief minister asserted that the NPP government believes in the welfare of the people and has delivered on its promises. He informed the gathering that the 50-crore project will ease public concerns and mentioned the ongoing 100-crore-plus Weloi-Mawsynram road, which is being constructed under a World Bank-funded project.

"The opposition may say anything, but they never made the road and the bridge in this region," he said.

"The NPP has ensured the construction of the road, and the bridge at Khasipara is being redesigned and will be completed soon."

He also urged the people to reinstate their faith in the NPP, as they had voted for the government in the 2019 KHADC election, empowering it to initiate development. He acknowledged the neglect faced by people living in the India-Bangladesh border region for over 50 years and reiterated the need for a capable leader to represent the people. The chief minister assured the people that he will stand by them and ensure progress and development in the region. (NNN)

# AAPLU organised awareness and health camp at Dambuk



**HT Correspondent**  
**ITANAGAR, Feb 18 :** The All Arunachal Pradesh Labour Union (AAPLU) on Tuesday organised a mega awareness cum health camp which benefited hundreds of local workers community of Dambuk and adjoining areas of Lower Dibang Valley district.

The mega awareness camp was organised in collaboration with the Arunachal Pradesh building and other construction workers welfare board (APB7OCWWB). Hundreds of worker community from various organisation including the organised and unorganised and PSU and local who could take part in the awareness camp and avail the benefit of free healthy camp and free medicines and other essential items.

Dambuk MLA Puinnyo Apum who was chief guest motivated the worker community to remain committed towards their work and always maintain dignity of labour. He assured all support for the peace, development and prosperity of all the people for all round development of state.

Labour minister PRO T H Cherom was guest of honour and the NHPC executive director (Dibang Project) L K Tripathi was guest of honour and special guest respectively. AAPLU president Dan Tadu addressed the gathering to maintain unity, communal harmony and brotherhood and work with a commitment to bring better output for the employers. During discharge of duty always maintain the dignity of labour. He also emphasised the need of such mega awareness programme and providing health facility including distribution of free medicines and other essentials which were meant for the workers community being provided by the Labour board from time to time.

# SSB, Tawang conducts veterinary camp

**HT Correspondent**  
**ITANAGAR, Feb 18:** The 38th Battalion of Sashstra Seema Bal (SSB), Tawang conducted a veterinary camp under the Civic Action Programme, providing essential veterinary services to livestock and pet owners in Mogto and Serjong villages.

The camp was organised under the supervision of Dr Sudhir Sangma, 2IC SSB, and Dr Honjon Perme, EAC, Jang.

A total of 34 livestock and pet owners benefited from the camp, where 260 animals were treated including 226 bovine (Cattle), 8 Caprine (Goats), 10 Canine (Dogs) and 16 Poultry.

Additionally, five canine animals were vaccinated during the camp.

As part of the initiative, livestock owners were also educated on Foot and Mouth Disease

(FMD), Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD), Rabies, and Tick-borne Protozoan diseases.

They were encouraged to adopt best practices such as periodic deworming, routine use of topical Flumethrin, and regular vaccinations against FMD, LSD, and Rabies. Awareness was also spread on the importance of regular livestock examinations to prevent common diseases and enhance productivity.

The villagers expressed their heartfelt gratitude to the SSB and the civil administration for bringing essential veterinary services to their doorstep, ensuring better health for their livestock and pets.

This initiative reflects SSB's commitment to community welfare and its continuous efforts to support local populations through healthcare and awareness programs.

# No external interference to be tolerated in Arunachal, says Guv

**ITANAGAR, Feb 18:** Emphasising that no external interference will be tolerated in Arunachal Pradesh, Governor Lt Gen (Retd) K T Parnaik has reiterated the state government's commitment to protect its citizens from outside influence and intimidation, particularly in Tirap, Changlang and Loding districts.

Chairing a high-level review meeting at Khonsa in Tirap district on Monday, the governor issued warning to anti-national elements attempting to disrupt peace in the three eastern districts of the state, cautioning them of severe consequences.

Addressing security officials, Parnaik stressed that a secure environment is essential for the development and progress

of the state and its people, according to a statement from the Raj Bhavan here, on Tuesday.

Highlighting the strategic importance of border security, he emphasised that all necessary measures must be taken to safeguard national interests and ensure the well-being of residents in border areas.

The governor also urged security forces to build stronger ties with villagers in remote border areas and support their essential needs through Sadbhavana projects, fostering trust and cooperation.

The meeting was attended by Director General of Police Anand Mohan, 25 Sector Assam Rifles Commander Brigadier Sarabjeet Singh and others. (PTI)

"In urban areas, we have secured assistance from ADB to ensure 24x7 water supply in 12 towns of Tripura. Under AMRUT 2.0, we have taken up water supply projects covering 8 towns. Major water bodies in Agartala and other places have been rejuvenated under the Mukhyamantri Nagar Unnayan Prakaalp.

Tripura has 10 major rivers, which are fast-flowing. During the monsoon, these rivers cause severe riverbank erosion and flooding. Last year, Tripura witnessed record rainfall, and most of our rivers set new flood water records, causing massive damage. Our government has taken multiple steps to mitigate the flood situation, including constructing 43 flood protection embankments and carrying out anti-erosion work on riverbanks. For integrated and sustainable water resource management, we are preparing a state-specific action plan with a comprehensive and integrated water vision by 2047, focusing on resource management, addressing demand-supply gaps, and considering the challenges of climate change," he added.

# Tripura aims 80% irrigation coverage to boost agriculture: CM

### Groundwater extraction potential rises to 1.18 BCM in 2024

**HT Correspondent**  
**AGARTALA, Feb 18:** Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Tuesday said that the state government has set a target of achieving 80% irrigation coverage of cultivable land in the next few years.

He also informed that the state government has taken multiple steps to mitigate flood situations, including the construction of 43 flood protection embankments and carrying out anti-erosion work on riverbanks.

Saha made these remarks while addressing the 2nd All India State Water Ministers Conference 2025 at Udaipur, Rajasthan, on Tuesday.

"Tripura is the third smallest state, with a geographical area of 10,491 sq. km. It is predominantly a hilly state, with more than 70% of the area covered by forests. People living in these areas mostly depend on agriculture for their livelihood. The government of Tripura is giving priority to constructing more irrigation projects to improve agricultural productivity and help farmers double their income. The total cultivable land



is 25% of the total geographical area, and 47% of the cultivable land is covered with irrigation. We aim to achieve 80% irrigation coverage of cultivable land in the next few years," said Saha.

He stated that due to fast-flowing rivers and limited water storage capacity, there is little scope for surface water-based irrigation projects in the state. Therefore, the state has emphasized constructing rainwater storage structures and minor irrigation dams.

"We have identified suitable sites for 98 minor irrigation projects covering 30,000 hectares and initiated work on

14 projects. Our state is blessed with abundant groundwater resources due to a long rainy season and extensive forest areas. We utilize only 9.48% of groundwater, compared to the national average. We have also undertaken deep tube wells for irrigation as well as drinking water purposes. Since the launch of the Jal Shakti Abhiyan - Catch The Rain, the annual extractable dynamic groundwater resources have increased from 1.063 billion cubic meters in 2023 to 1.18 billion cubic meters in 2024," said Saha.

Saha informed that the state government has undertaken activities for water conservation, rainwater harvesting, renovation of traditional water bodies, watershed development, and intensive afforestation.

"More than 45,000 water structures have been developed under the Jal Shakti Abhiyan - Catch The Rain since its inception. 975 Amrit Sarovars in 8 districts and several heritage water structures dating back to the 14th century have been rejuvenated. At the launch of Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in 2019, only 24,000 rural households (3.26%) had tap water connections. As of February 4, 2025, 6.38 lakh households (~85%) have assured tap water supplies. In hilly areas where groundwater is unavailable, innovative water supply schemes based on available sources such as local streams, springs, and water reservoirs are being implemented," said Saha.

He further stated that 4,347 schools (96%) and 88,435 Anganwadi Centers (96.10%) have started receiving potable piped water, and the government has set a target of achieving 100% coverage by September 31, 2025, in all rural areas.

of the state and its people, according to a statement from the Raj Bhavan here, on Tuesday.

Highlighting the strategic importance of border security, he emphasised that all necessary measures must be taken to safeguard national interests and ensure the well-being of residents in border areas.

The governor also urged security forces to build stronger ties with villagers in remote border areas and support their essential needs through Sadbhavana projects, fostering trust and cooperation.

The meeting was attended by Director General of Police Anand Mohan, 25 Sector Assam Rifles Commander Brigadier Sarabjeet Singh and others. (PTI)

No. **BTC/LR- 32/2025/71**, Dated **Kokrajhar, the 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2025.**

**NOTICE INVITING QUOTATION**

Sealed quotation affixing a court fee stamp of Rs.8.25 (Rupees eight and paise twenty five only) is hereby invited from the intending registered farms/ submit Quotations for "**Supply of Machinery items, Furnitures and Stationeries under Bengtol Revenue Circle, Bengtol and Bijni Revenue Circle, Bijni, Dist.-Chirang**" with the following terms and conditions.

The quotation will be received from 13.02.2025 to 05.03.2025 (11:00 AM till 3:00 PM) and will be opened on 05.03.2025 at 3:30 PM in presence of Quotationers or their representatives. In case of any unusual occurrence like Strike/ Govt. holiday etc. the receiving & opening of quotation will be on the next working day at the same time.

**Terms & Conditions: -**

- The quotation should be submitted with up-to-date documents as follows:-
  - Income Tax clearance for 3 (three) years.
  - GST Registration Certificate.
  - PAN Card.
  - Trade License.
 The Council may ask for any additional documents, if required.
- The rate of the items shall be quoted excluding GST and GST amount shall be shown separately.
- The undersigned is not bound to accept the lowest rate and reserves the right to reject any or all quotation at any time without assigning any reason thereof.
- An amount of Rs. 10,000.00 (Rupees Ten Thousand only) is to be deposited as security money in the form of Bank Draft in favour of the Principal Secretary, BTC along with quotation which will be refundable in due course.
- For details contact CALA, BTC Secretariat during office hours.

Sd/-Secretary,  
Bodoland Territorial Council,  
Kokrajhar

**IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/1499**

No. **BTC/LR- 32/2025/72**, Dated **Kokrajhar, the 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2025.**

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Sealed quotation affixing a court fee stamp of Rs.8.25 (Rupees eight and paise twenty five only) is hereby invited from the intending registered farms/ submit Quotations for "**Supply of Machinery items, Furnitures and Stationeries under Jalah Revenue Circle, Jalahghat and Barama Revenue Circle, Barama, Dist.-Baksa**" with the following terms and conditions.

The quotation will be received from 13.02.2025 to 05.03.2025 (11:00 AM till 3:00 PM) and will be opened on 05.03.2025 at 3:30 PM in presence of Quotationers or their representatives. In case of any unusual occurrence like Strike/ Govt. holiday etc. the receiving & opening of quotation will be on the next working day at the same time.

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Sd/-Secretary,  
Bodoland Territorial Council,  
Kokrajhar

**IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/1500**

# Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar, who oversaw LS and J-K polls, demits office

**NEW DELHI, Feb 18:** Rajiv Kumar, who oversaw the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and the crucial Jammu and Kashmir assembly polls, demits office on Tuesday as the 25th chief election commissioner after a nearly three-year tenure marked with high electoral successes but also repeated allegations of bias by opposition parties.

Kumar joined the poll panel as an Election Commissioner on September 1, 2020, and assumed charge as the 25th CEC on May 15, 2022. He served the EC for about four-and-a-half years in the two capacities.

During his time with the EC, he effected reforms across various aspects of its functioning: structural, technological, capacity development, communication, international cooperation and administration.

Kumar completed one "full electoral cycle" by overseeing the conduct of elections in 31 states and union territories, the Presidential and Vice Presidential elections in 2022, Lok Sabha elections in 2024 and Rajya Sabha polls.

However, he often faced criticism of opposition parties and activists on several issues including the efficacy of Electronic Voting Machines, alleged fudging of voter data and being "lenient" on the ruling BJP.

While the Commission re-



sponded -- and rejected -- to the allegations in writing, Kumar often took to poetry to defend himself and the poll authority.

When he was attacked for "being lenient on the ruling BJP to bag a post-retirement job", Kumar announced he would go to the "deep Himalayas" for six months after demitting office to "detoxify" himself.

On his last day in office on Tuesday, Kumar told PTI Videos he is leaving the EC in very capable hands -- the government announced on Monday night Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar will succeed Rajiv Kumar -- and the Indian voter will stand behind the Commission with all their might.

In his media interactions, Rajiv Kumar often questioned the timing of petitions raising doubts over poll processes. He said the intent behind filing petitions just before an election was to discredit the EC and the entire electoral process.

In his farewell address, Kumar said he "observed a pattern in the timing of certain narratives".

"The live reporting of hearing of long-pending cases at critical junctures, sometimes fuel distrust that the petitioner intends to create. It would be beneficial if such proceedings are scheduled with due consideration to the election period, ensuring that the electoral process remains smooth and undisturbed. This is a specific expectation of India's esteemed constitutional Courts," he said.

He also said that the Election Commission remains steadfast in its commitment to addressing concerns surrounding promises of unchecked freebies and over-promising manifestos.

"While the matter related to freebies is currently sub-judice, and I hope for a timely decision from the court, it is imperative in the interim that political promises are backed by clear disclosures on their financial viability and their effect on the fiscal health of the state," he said.

In 2021, when the world was dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, Kumar as election commissioner had drafted an affidavit, saying the courts may punish him if he was in the wrong but they should absolve the EC of doubts.

The affidavit planned to be filed before the Madras High Court, and later the Supreme Court, could not be submitted.

He wanted to respond to an observation by the Madras HC that the EC was singularly responsible for Covid surge in Tamil Nadu by holding assembly polls amid the pandemic.

Kumar had also been vocally critical of the way exit polls are held and how news channels show trends during early period of counting of votes. He had dubbed the

practice of showing early trends on counting day by news channels as "nonsense".

Kumar also said exit polls create a huge distraction by raising expectations and it was a matter for self-inspection for the media, particularly electronic media.

"We do not govern exit polls, but there is a need for self-inspection. What was the sample size, where was the survey done, how did the result come and what is my responsibility if I did not match to that result, are these disclosures -- all of these need to be seen," Kumar said recently.

Prior to assuming charge in the Election Commission, Kumar had been chairman, Public Enterprises Selection Board during April-August 2020. He was the Union Finance Secretary from July 2019 to February 2020, and Secretary, Financial Services from September 2017 to July 2019 and Establishment Officer from March 2015 to June 2017.

An officer of the Indian Administrative Service of Bihar/Jharkhand cadre of the 1984 batch, he superannuated in February 2020 from government service.

During his tenure as CEC, Kumar carried out delimitation of Parliamentary and Assembly constituencies of Assam. (PTI)

# 'PM Modi to launch all latest industrial policies of MP during GIS inauguration'



**BHOPAL, Feb 18:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch all the latest industrial policies of Madhya Pradesh during the inauguration of the two-day Global Investors Summit (GIS) here on February 24, state Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said on Tuesday.

The inauguration will take place around 10 am, he said.

At the event, PM Modi will also visit the Madhya Pradesh Experience Zone to be set up on the GIS campus here, the CM said.

In this zone, a coordinated combination and display of Madhya Pradesh's heritage, progress so far and future aspirations will be showcased in the form of an immersive digital walk-through.

The chief minister chaired a meeting of the apex committee constituted for organising GIS 2025 on February 24 and 25 on the Indra Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya campus in Bhopal. The meeting was held at the 'Samatva Bhawan' (CM's residence).

During the meeting, he directed the officials to ensure that all departments work in coordination and harmony to make the GIS a grand, well-organised and result-oriented event.

The GIS is being organised with the aim of strengthening the economy of Madhya Pradesh and attracting investors from the country and abroad. Therefore, to make the event historic, all preparations should be done on a large scale, an official statement quoted CM Yadav as saying.

Yadav reviewed the preparations of the GIS and instructed the officials to effectively present all the investor-friendly industrial policies of the state, the extensive infrastructure and possibilities available for industries in the state to attract the

investors easily.

To make Madhya Pradesh an industry-friendly state, all the necessary assistance and facilities required by the investors should be provided, he said.

The investors coming to attend the GIS in Bhopal from across the country and abroad are our special guests, so they should be welcomed and greeted as per the traditional Indian hospitality, Yadav said.

To make these two days memorable, Madhya Pradesh's culture, its traditions, various art products, food, cuisine, among other things, need to be showcased before the guests to make their experience special, he said.

Directing the officials to ensure that ponds in the state capital and the entire Bhopal city are beautified, he said, adding that e-battery operated boats should be operated in Badi Jheel (Upper Lake), so that investors and other participants can enjoy the unique beauty of Bhopal. This investors summit will give a new dimension to the industrial development of the state and step up employment opportunities, he told the officials.

Participants from more than 60 countries will take part in the GIS, it was told during the meeting chaired by the CM.

A total of 133 foreign participants, including the Deputy Minister of Zimbabwe, Ambassadors of 10 countries, High Commissioners of eight countries, Consul Generals of seven countries, will take part in the event, officials said.

More than 300 Chairpersons, Managing Directors (MDs) and Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of leading companies of India, including leading industrialists of the country, will also participate, they said. (PTI)

## Issue B-Khata to properties in illegal layouts as one-time settlement: CM Siddaramaiah

**BENGALURU, Feb 18:** Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday instructed officials to put an end to the illegal residential layouts in Karnataka by issuing B-Khata to properties as a one-time settlement.

Siddaramaiah also directed them to complete the process within three months.

In residential areas in Karnataka, people get A-Khata for the layouts approved by the competent authorities such as Bengaluru Development Authority (BDA) or Urban Development Authorities. The properties on layouts without approval get B-Khata as they are illegal. This move will give relief to lakhs of property owners across the state and generate huge revenue for the government, a municipal officer told PTI.

Chairing a meeting with the officials of the Urban Development Department and Deputy Commissioners of the districts through video conference, the chief minister said the menace of illegal layouts should end once and for all.

"We will end this (illegal layout menace) by giving B-Khata once and for all. This is only one-time measure. You (officials) have been given only three months. Conduct a campaign and complete it within this time," Siddaramaiah was quoted in a statement issued by his office.

The CM said the government will put an end to the unauthorised settlements which are there in all the cities, towns, municipal limits and villages.

"There should be no room for unauthorised settlements in the state from now on. We have started a drive to put an end to unauthorised settlements through the law. The officials should clearly understand and start their work," Siddaramaiah said in the meeting.

He told the officers that the state is not getting revenue from unauthorised layouts.

"People are not getting civic

amenities and local bodies are also losing income. All these disadvantages need to be put to an end," the chief minister said.

The government will not compromise on this anymore, he said, and warned that the administration will not tolerate if the officials compromise.

"If unauthorised settlements raise their heads again, the District Collector, Chief Officer, and Urban Planning Officers will be held accountable. We will take action against them without hesitation," the chief minister said in the meeting. He also asked the officials to drive away middlemen and brokers immediately.

Siddaramaiah also told the officials that they should clearly understand the government's vision behind enacting laws to curb illegal layouts.

"Illegal layouts and settlements on revenue (agriculture) land should not raise their head again in the state. Those who have sites and built houses in unauthorised and revenue settlements should not be troubled."

"You have to give a one-time solution to facilitate the poor and middle class. Give everyone B-Khata within three months and end it. Start giving B-Khata from today itself. Let there be no confusion," the CM said at the meeting.

Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda, Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre and Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh and other senior officials were present at the meeting. Later speaking to reporters, Siddaramaiah said the government had formed a committee led by Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre. After the committee gave its report, a law was formulated to check illegal layouts.

"Presently we are giving all facilities to the properties in the revenue layouts, but they are not paying taxes. Hence, I have directed officials to launch a B-Khata drive," he said. (PTI)

## AISF stages protest over MoE 'blackmailing' Tamil Nadu into implementing NEP 2020

**NEW DELHI, Feb 18:** The left-affiliated student organisation AISF on Tuesday staged a protest outside Shastri Bhawan against the Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's recent statement linking central education funds to Tamil Nadu's implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

There was no immediate response from the Union Education Ministry regarding the protest. Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan stated that funds under the Samagra Shiksha scheme would not be released for Tamil Nadu unless the state fully implemented NEP 2020. He accused the DMK-led Tamil Nadu government of politicizing the policy.

NEP 2020 undermines regional autonomy, promotes privatization, increases inequality, and disregards Tamil Nadu's commitment to linguistic and cultural preservation in education, All India Students Federation (AISF) said in a statement.

"The Centre is blackmailing states into implementing NEP 2020 by withholding crucial education funds," it added.

"We organised a peaceful protest outside the Education Ministry. The minister's remark on NEP implementation is an attempt to coerce states that have not adopted it. Many states in India do not have a BJP government. Despite our peaceful demonstration, we were detained," AISF National President Viraj Devang told PTI.

AISF National General Secretary Dinesh Seerangaraj accused Pradhan

of "threatening" Tamil Nadu by conditioning the release of Rs 2,000 crore in central education funds on the state's acceptance of NEP 2020. "This is a threat to the Constitution and to non-BJP-ruled states," he said.

The demonstrators were later detained by the Delhi Police.

According to Seerangaraj, the detained protesters were taken to Bawana Police Station and released after some time.

On Saturday, Pradhan said that funds under the Samagra Shiksha scheme would not be released for Tamil Nadu unless the state fully implemented NEP 2020. He accused the DMK-led Tamil Nadu government of politicizing the policy and questioned why they were resisting it when the rest of the country had adopted it. (PTI)

AISF National General Secretary Dinesh Seerangaraj accused Pradhan

## 'Congress acting like cry babies, no rule broken in CEC appointment'

**NEW DELHI, Feb 18:** Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Tuesday attacked Congress leader Rahul Gandhi over his criticism about appointment of new CEC and alleged they are acting like "cry babies" even when no rule or law has been broken.

Gandhi on Tuesday alleged it is "disrespectful" and "discourteous" for the prime minister and home minister to have made a midnight decision to select the new chief election commissioner (CEC), when the process of selection is being challenged in the Supreme Court.

The government late on Monday night appointed Gyanesh Kumar the new CEC, hours after the meeting of the prime minister-led selection committee in which Gandhi, the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, asked the government to defer its decision on the new CEC in view of the Supreme Court hearing in the matter.

"Congress Party crushed the Constitution at their convenience to serve their political interests. Congress never left an opportunity to ridicule and insult Baba Saheb Ambedkar, yet the Yuvraj of Congress has the audacity to take a grandstand on upholding Baba Saheb's ideals and that of our founding leaders," Pradhan said in a post on X.

"This latest jig by @RahulGandhi is another attempt to create controversy and peddle propaganda on the appointment of CEC. Has Rahul Gandhi forgotten how ECs were appointed during Congress rule? Despite being in power for decades why did Congress govt do nothing to reform the selection mechanism?" he asked. (PTI)

## They want to teach children Urdu and make them 'maulvis': Adityanath lashes out at SP

**LUCKNOW, Feb 18:** Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday slammed Samajwadi Party for demanding translation of House proceedings in Urdu as well, saying they send their own children to English medium schools but want others' children to learn Urdu and become "maulvis".

On the first day of the Budget Session, the House witnessed a heated exchange between him and SP leader Mata Prasad Pandey who demanded including Urdu translation after Speaker Satish Mahana announced it would be available in four regional languages -- Awadhi, Bhojpur, Braj and Bundeli -- as well as English.

Pandey's objection to including English and demand for Urdu translation irked the chief minister who accused the Samajwadi Party of having double-standards.

"They send their children to English medium schools but when the government wants to extend this opportunity to others' children, they (SP leaders) say 'teach them Urdu'... they want to make these children maulvis. They want to take the country towards fanaticism (kathmulla-pan)," Adityanath said.

Pandey, also the Leader of the Opposition, said the use of English in assembly isn't jus-

tified. "By promoting, English you are weakening Hindi," he said.

If English was included then Urdu must be included too, Pandey demanded.

In his response, Adityanath said the government is committed to the preservation and promotion of these sub-languages or dialects of Hindi.

"We are also forming separate academies for promotion of these languages, which are 'daughters' of Hindi and should be given their due. This House is not only for scholars, but is meant to be the voice of every section of the society," he said.

"Those opposing Bhojpur, Awadhi, Braj and Bundelkhandi are actually against the cultural heritage of Uttar Pradesh," he said. Pandey countered the CM by stating that he and his party were not opposing inclusion of regional languages. "We are only opposing the inclusion of English," he said, telling the House Samajwadis have always favoured Hindi over English.

Adityanath, however, said, "Brajbhasha is so rich that Sant Surdas composed his works in this language. Similarly, Sant Tulsidas ji composed Ramcharitmanas in Awadhi, which helped not just North India but also the NRIs during the crisis." (PTI)

## Amit Shah assured us he will look into Santosh Deshmukh murder case, claims Supriya Sule

**CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, Feb 18:** NCP (SP) MP Supriya Sule on Tuesday claimed Union Home Minister Amit Shah had assured her that he would look into the sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh murder case.

Sule slammed local authorities in Beed for their "failure" to arrest absconding accused Santosh Andhale even two months after Deshmukh was killed.

The murder of Deshmukh triggered a political firestorm in Maharashtra over alleged links between state minister Dhananjay Munde, who belongs to NCP, and Walmik Karad, an accused arrested in an extortion case linked to the murder.

The Massajog village sarpanch was abducted, tortured, and murdered on December 9, 2024, for allegedly trying to stop an extortion bid targeting an energy firm.

The police have so far arrested seven persons in connection with the murder.

Sule met family members of Deshmukh in Massajog village and later the kin of murdered trader Mahadev Munde in Parli town, also in Beed district.

Talking to reporters at Massajog

village, Sule said she and Beed MP Bajrang Sonawane (NCP SP) had met Amit Shah in connection with the Santosh Deshmukh murder case and Shah assured to look into it.

Sule added that she would also meet state Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis to seek justice for Deshmukh's family.

The NCP (SP) working president consoled family members of Mahadev Munde, whose murder in 2023 allegedly remains unsolved.

She called up Beed superintendent of police Navneet Kanwat over the phone and demanded a transparent inquiry.

Earlier in the day, Sule slammed Walmik Karad over a video he had shared before surrendering to police in the extortion case.

"Walmik Karad made a video before his surrender. How do people have the courage to make such a video before surrendering? Where did Krishna Andhale go? If they can track our phones daily, can't they find Andhale? This is not acceptable," she said.

The Baramati MP alleged the government was not transparent in the Deshmukh murder case. (PTI)

## Nothing wrong in Shinde setting up medical aid cell: CM Fadnavis

**MUMBAI, Feb 18:** Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday said there is nothing wrong in the setting up of a medical aid cell at Mantralaya by Deputy CM Eknath Shinde as the aim is to help people. Shinde, who has set up the medical aid cell despite presence of the Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF), on Monday said there is "absolutely no cold war" with CM Devendra Fadnavis.

Shinde's close aide Mangesh Chivate will head the new medical cell. The development comes amid a tussle between Mahayuti allies in the state government over various issues, including guardian ministers' appointments.

Responding to a query from reporters on Tuesday, Fadnavis said, "There is nothing wrong in the formation of such a cell as its aim is to help people. When I was the deputy chief minister, I had formed a similar cell."

Shinde on Monday said the establishment of the cell is a step forward in their collective efforts to



assist citizens. It will connect with the Chief Minister's War Room and is intended to enhance service delivery, not to create a competing system, he said.

"There is absolutely no cold war between us. We are united in our fight against those who oppose development. When I was chief minister, on October 31, 2023, then deputy chief minister Fadnavis had founded a similar cell. I have simply reconstituted it with my people

overseeing its operations," Shinde asserted.

Meanwhile, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut claimed a "parallel government" was operating within the state administration.

"If the government continues to operate in this manner, political chaos will escalate further, he told reporters here.

Raut also accused the BJP of "using EVMs" to secure the win of 56 to 57 MLAs, and claimed they

# Domestic Violence Act: SC slams states, UTs for not filing status reports

NEW DELHI, Feb 18: The Supreme Court on Tuesday pulled up several states and union territories for not filing status reports over the implementation of the domestic violence law while allowing them four more weeks subject to the payment of ₹ 5,000 as costs.

A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Prasanna B Varale took note when the petitioner's counsel said several states and UTs did not file their status reports despite the top court's direction.

"The counsel for the respective states have sought for some more time to file status reports. Hence, four more weeks are granted to file status reports subject to payment of cost of ₹ 5,000 to the Supreme Court mediation centre," the bench said.

The bench noted Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh,



Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Odisha, Telangana, West Bengal and Assam were among the defaulters.

UTs of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and Lakshadweep also did not file the status reports, it was further informed.

"Pay cost of ₹ 5,000 and file it. If you don't file it, next time it will double," said Justice Na-

garathna. The bench posted the matter on March 25.

In its December 2 2024 order, the apex court said the status report had to be filed with regard to implementation of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.

On January 17, the top court extended the time for filing of the

status reports by the states and UTs till February 14.

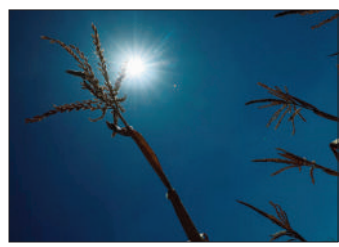
While hearing the matter in November last year, the apex court said the prayers in the petition were essentially for the implementation of the 2005 law.

While issuing notices, the top court said the obligation for the implementation of the law not only rested with the Centre but also with the respective state governments.

The plea sought directions to the authorities for the proper enforcement and implementation of the provisions of the 2005 Act aside from directions for adequate appointments, notification and establishment of protection officers, service providers and shelter homes as directed under the Act.

The plea also sought initiation and strict implementation of awareness campaigns related to crime against women. (PTI)

## Kashmir may see 'drought' as Jan, Feb record 80 pc precipitation deficit: MeT



SRINAGAR, Feb 18: Kashmir has witnessed a dry winter this year with the months of January and February recording a precipitation deficit of around 80 per cent, which has raised the possibility of drought in the valley this summer, the MeT department officials said.

Several water bodies are flowing below the zero level mark at many places while some springs in south Kashmir have dried up completely due to the receding water table, they said.

"There has been a 79 per cent deficient precipitation in the month of January and the situation in February so far is worse. If the dry weather continues, it is going to cause problems for the residents of the valley as there won't be enough water for drinking or irrigating the fields," a MeT department official said.

An official of the Irrigation and Flood Control Department said the water level in River Jhelum and several other water bodies was more than a metre below the usual water level for this time of the year.

"If it does not rain or snow in the next fortnight, there is a possibility of crisis with regards to water for drinking and irrigation purposes," he added.

Social media is flooded with videos and images of dried up water bodies with Aecchabal springs in south Kashmir having dried up completely.

The river bed of Jhelum is visible at many places, especially upstream in south Kashmir areas while the water level downstream in north Kashmir is alarmingly low. The situation is similar in other major streams of the valley.

The lack of enough snowfall has forced authorities to postpone the fifth edition of Khelo India Winter Games which were scheduled to begin from February 22.

While most of the Gulmarg bowl is bereft of snow, the higher reaches of the famous skiing destination does not have enough snow for safe conduct of sports activities. (PTI)

## MP HC allows 'trial run' of Union Carbide waste disposal at Pithampur

JABALPUR, Feb 18: The Madhya Pradesh High Court on Tuesday allowed the state government to carry out a trial run of the disposal of 40-year-old chemical waste from the defunct Union Carbide factory in Bhopal in Pithampur area of Dhar district.

The incineration at a disposal plant inside the industrial area of Pithampur will be carried out in three phases from February 27. Advocate General Prashant Singh told reporters here after a court hearing.

The government on Tuesday filed a compliance report, sought by the high court in January, about the steps it had taken for creating public awareness about the waste disposal process, he said.

Locals in Pithampur are fiercely opposed to the planned disposal, near their town, of the waste linked to the 1984 Bhopal Gas Tragedy which killed more than 5,000 people.

It has carried out an awareness campaign and now a trial run of the disposal should be allowed, the government requested the court.

As per the HC order, the trial run will be carried out in three phases, with 10 tons of waste being disposed of in each phase, said advocate general Singh who

represented the government.

In the phase of the trial, waste will be disposed of at a rate of 135 kilograms per hour. It will be accelerated to 180 kg per hour and 270 kg per hour in the second and third phases, he said.

As per the HC's directions, the first trial run will take place on February 27, the second on March 4, followed by the third on a date yet unspecified, the advocate general added.

Results of the trial runs will be submitted to the Central Pollution Control Board, which will then prescribe the 'feed rate' at which disposal of the remaining waste should be carried out, he said.

A total of 337 tons of hazardous waste from the Union Carbide factory has arrived at the Pithampur disposal plant, over 200 km from Bhopal.

A compliance report will be submitted to the court on March 27. Sumit Raghuvanshi, a local resident who has moved the high court against the planned disposal of the waste in Pithampur, said he and others were steadfast on their stand.

"We have submitted a plea to the high court, stating that the Union Carbide waste should not be disposed of in Pithampur be-

cause the town is already very polluted," he said.

The Air Quality Index in the area was 350 and the groundwater was not drinkable, Raghuvanshi claimed.

"I hope the high court will not allow the disposal of waste in Pithampur. The HC heard our plea today. Possibly, the court will take a decision on our plea at the next hearing," he said.

While expressing his faith in the court, Raghuvanshi said residents of Pithampur have also sent one lakh postcards to the President and Chief Justice of India, opposing the disposal.

On Monday, the Supreme Court, hearing a petition, sought responses from the Centre, Madhya Pradesh and the state pollution control board on the issue.

The apex court agreed to hear the plea challenging the December 3, 2024, and January 6, 2025, orders of the Madhya Pradesh High Court.

The high court, in its December order, had rebuked the state authorities for not cleaning up the Union Carbide site in Bhopal despite directions from the Supreme Court, and set a four-week deadline to shift the waste to a disposal site. (PTI)

## Minor girl well aware of 'bad touch', says HC; refuses to quash ex-Army officer's imprisonment

MUMBAI, Feb 18: The Bombay High Court has refused to quash a court martial order sentencing a former Lieutenant Colonel to five years' imprisonment for sexually assaulting an 11-year-old girl, noting the victim was well aware of the "bad touch".

The girl's demonstration in court regarding the specific manner in which the accused behaved with her once her father left the room was depicted with immense clarity, a division bench of Justices Revati Mohite Dere and Neela Gokhale said on Monday.

The bench dismissed a petition filed by the accused, challenging the January 2024 order passed by the Armed Forces Tribunal (AFT) confirming the five-year imprisonment imposed on him by the General Court Martial (GCM).

In March 2021, the GCM of the Army held him guilty for committing aggravated sexual assault on a minor girl and sexual harassment under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

He was sentenced to the minimum punishment of five years' imprisonment.

The former Army officer in his plea in the HC claimed he had no ill intention and that he touched the girl and asked for a kiss only out of "grandfatherly/fatherly" love for the child.

The high court, however, refused to accept this contention and said the victim girl's instinct of identifying a bad touch of the accused must be believed.

The victim in her statement before the GCM has to-

tally denied the suggestion that the accused had not touched her with any bad intent and that it was in the nature of a touch of a parent or grandfather, the HC said.

The girl met the accused for the very first time and there was no reason for him to hold her hand even under the pretext of reading her palm, touch her thigh and request to kiss her, the court said.

"The girl immediately sensed a bad touch and reported as such to her father instantly. In view of this deposition, we are unable to take issues and dissent with the findings of either the GCM or the AFT," the HC bench said.

The high court said it has not found any error with the findings of the GCM and the AFT.

"We do not find any violation of fundamental rights of the petitioner. There is no infirmity in the decision-making process in arriving at the impugned finding by both the GCM and AFT," the bench said.

In his plea, the accused claimed there has been a violation of his fundamental rights as the GCM has not appreciated the evidence in the case properly.

As per the complaint, the accused in February 2020 touched the thigh of the girl, daughter of an army havildar (constable), and asked for a kiss from her.

The havildar had brought his daughter and younger son to the accused's room when he asked to meet them.

The girl immediately called her father and informed him of the incident, after which a complaint was lodged. (PTI)

## Don't stress about syllabus volume, prioritise, revise: Toppers share tips during Pariksha Pe Charcha

NEW DELHI, Feb 18: Not taking stress about volume of syllabus, prioritising topics, revision and personalised preparation -- these are among the tips shared by toppers of various exams with school students during the last episode of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's annual Pariksha Pe Charcha, broadcast on Tuesday.

From topper of NDA entrance to UPSC, IIT entrance JEE-Advanced to Law entrance CLAT and alumni of previous editions of Pariksha Pe Charcha (PPC), eight youngsters shared their experience during a special session of the annual event in which Modi interacts with students appearing for the board examinations.

In a shift from the traditional town hall format, Modi preferred a more informal setting this time and took students to Delhi's iconic Sunder Nursery for the interaction. Eminent personalities such as actors Deepika Padukone, Bhumi Pednekar and Vikrant Massey, boxing champion Mary Kom and spiritual leader Sadhguru have also shared their experiences and knowledge on key aspects of life and learning in different episodes of Pariksha Pe Charcha (PPC).

Brahmcharimayun Nishtha, an MBBS student from Manipur University, who anchored a previous edition of PPC said the first stress about board exams comes from the volume of syllabus.

"Such a vast syllabus, how will we cover it? How many hours we need to study? All these thoughts bother us a lot. We need to understand that we cannot retain everything in our mind at least in one go. You should identify some specific topics, also learn to prioritise what needs to be covered first and then revision. Also focus on questions asked in previous years," Nishtha said. Radhika Singhal, CBSE topper



per of 2022-23, said "we should not think about what questions will be asked in exam but focus on our preparations and have faith on it."

Ashish Kumar Verma, an IIT Delhi student and former PPC anchor, said everybody's preparation is personalised.

"There is no single rule which will be applicable for me and also everyone else. For instance, I did not find making notes very helpful, so I used different strategies and that is what should be done," he said.

Armanpreet Singh, who was topper of the National Defence Academy (NDA) entrance exam last year, said one should not be bothered about the volume of syllabus.

"We usually have a habit of counting the number of pages of the chapter before we begin reading or learning it. This impacts our psychology. I believe one should not be bothered about the volume at first and should divide everything into parts. We should also focus on our strengths more rather than weaknesses and that should reflect in our priority of topics while preparing," he said.

Shuchismita Adhikari, ISC Exam topper, 2023-24; Vavilala Chidvilas Reddy from IIT Bombay who bagged first rank in IIT en-

trance JEE-Advanced in 2023 and Jai Kumar Bohara from NLU Bangalore who topped the law entrance exam CLAT last year, also shared their experiences and learnings with the students.

Pariksha Pe Charcha is an annual event in which Modi also answers students queries related to exam stress and other issues.

The first edition of the interactive programme with school and college students was held at Delhi's Talkatora Stadium in 2018. A seventh edition was held in a town hall format at Bharat Mandapam, engaging participants from around the country and overseas.

Leadership lessons, meditation, exams versus knowledge, "focusing like a batter in action", and using technology wisely and not fearfully -- Modi touched upon multiple issues in a free-wheeling chat with students at Sunder Nursery during the first episode that was aired on February 10.

Nutrition and health experts Shonali Sabherwal, Rujuta Diwekar and Revant Himatsingka, YouTube Gaurav Chaudhary popularly known as TechGuruji and Radhika Gupta, MD and CEO, Edelweiss Mutual Fund, are among the other guests who have been part of the programme this year. (PTI)

## Air India Express to connect Kolkata with Hindon in Ghaziabad, first flight on March 1

KOLKATA, Feb 18: Air India Express, a subsidiary of Air India and a part of the Tata Group, is all set to connect Kolkata with the Hindon airport in Ghaziabad district of Uttar Pradesh, an airline spokesperson said on Tuesday.

The flight between the two places services will commence from March 1. The Kolkata to Hindon flight will operate daily, while the Hindon to Kolkata flights will operate six days a week except Saturdays, the spokesperson said.

The flights will take off at 7.10 am from Kolkata and reach Hindon at 9.30 am daily, while the return flights will leave Hindon airport at 5.20 pm and reach the eastern metropolis at 7.40 pm.

The spokesperson also claimed that AI Express will be the first airline to operate out of Hindon airport with a jet engine airliner and Kolkata will be the first place to be connected with the big plane.

According to sources, small airlines operate on short routes from Hindon currently.

With this expansion, Air India Express will operate from two airports in the National Capital Region (NCR) - Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi and Hindon Airport in Ghaziabad, he said.

Hindon Airport is expected to provide a convenient alternative for travellers from Central and Eastern Delhi, Noida, and nearby areas such as Akshardham, Anand Vihar, Parliament Street and Central Secretariat, Chandni Chowk, Connaught Place, Indirapuram, Karol Bagh, Vaishali and surrounding regions, the airline spokesperson said.

The flights between Kolkata and Hindon were supposed to commence from August 2024 but were postponed.

"We connect to 14 direct destina-



tions from Kolkata including Hindon. Some of the key destinations are Bagdogra, Bengaluru, Bhubaneswar, Chennai, Guwahati and Hyderabad," the spokesperson said. Besides connecting with Kolkata, the airline also has plans to connect Goa and Bengaluru to Hindon with six daily flights from each of these destinations.

For those flying in from Bengaluru, Goa, and Kolkata, Hindon Airport ensures quicker access to key areas in the National Capital Region.

It also makes air travel more accessible to a broader population, particularly aspiring travellers from western Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, including cities such as Bareilly, Bijnor, Dehradun, Haridwar, Hapur, Meerut, Moradabad, Mussoorie, Muzaffarnagar, Rampur, and Saharanpur, an airline statement said.

Meanwhile, sources said that the airline is planning to fly to Kathmandu and Dhaka from Kolkata from the summer schedule this year.

Air traffic control in Hindon is being provided by the Indian Air Force. The Civil Enclave Hindon has been developed and managed by AAI and also caters to the needs of VIP and non-scheduled flight movement.

Civil enclave means the area allotted to an airport belonging to any armed force for use by persons availing of any air transport services. (PTI)

## Data gaps persist, leave some of most vulnerable populations invisible across Asia and Pacific: UN

NEW DELHI, Feb 18: Data gaps persist and leave some of the most vulnerable populations invisible in official statistics, limiting policymakers' ability to address their needs effectively across Asia and the Pacific, according to a new UN report.

The report also highlighted that how efforts from surveying hundreds of nomadic tribal households across Rajasthan to health-monitoring mobile applications in Indonesia are transforming sustainable development in the region.

The new report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) released on Tuesday demonstrated that by amplifying the voices of under-represented communities, these solutions are not only making policies more inclusive but also making sustainable development monitoring more representative across Asia and the Pacific.

However, the Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2025 also stressed that urgent action is still needed in order to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

"Data gaps persist and leave some of the most vulnerable populations invisible in official statistics, limiting policymakers' ability to address their needs effectively," underscored United Nations Under-Secretary-General and ESCAP Executive Secretary Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana.

She added, "Constrained resources to modernize statistical systems pose additional hurdles. Without urgent action to accelerate progress, many of the Goals will remain out of reach."

The report said across Asia and the Pacific, communities are pioneering innovative solutions to bridge critical data gaps, ensuring that marginalized populations are no longer invisible in policymaking.



"From surveying hundreds of nomadic tribal households across Rajasthan State in India to health-monitoring mobile applications in Indonesia, these efforts are transforming sustainable development in the region," the report said.

The report said in India, the Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion conducted a household survey of 400 nomadic tribal

households across eight locations in Rajasthan, with strong collaboration and support from community-based organizations and volunteers.

The aim was to assess the development challenges of these tribal households and map community access to social protection.

The initiative highlighted the power of community-level infor-

mation for localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

"Additionally, it strengthened community volunteers' capacity to collect and analyse data, enabling them to identify local challenges and advocate for solutions through meaningful dialogues," the report said.

The report highlighted several SDG targets where Asia and the Pacific leads globally such as reducing income poverty (Goal 1), addressing undernourishment (Goal 2), supporting small-scale industries (Goal 9), reducing hazardous waste (Goal 12), mitigating land degradation (Goal 15), and combating human trafficking and intentional homicide (Goal 16).

Despite these strides, slow progress or setbacks in critical goals such as quality education (Goal 4), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), and responsible consumption and production (Goal 12) threaten re-

gional efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Rising fossil fuel subsidies, low literacy and numeracy rates, and unsustainable production patterns further compound these challenges, the report said.

Meanwhile, environmental degradation, increasing vulnerability to natural disasters, and persistent greenhouse gas emissions are exacerbating setbacks on climate action (Goal 13), life below water (Goal 14) and life on land (Goal 15).

The report further found that development benefits often bypass vulnerable groups, with intersecting factors like age, gender, education, location and wealth exacerbating inequalities.

"Poverty and education level are the two most significant factors contributing to inequality of opportunity. Poorer households in rural areas with lower levels of education are the most disadvan-

taged in accessing basic services such as water, sanitation and clean energy," the report said.

To bridge these gaps, ESCAP called for innovative and inclusive data collection and analysis. Nuanced and granular data will provide policymakers a clearer understanding of the realities of specific population groups especially those most at risk of being left behind.

The report further emphasised that transforming national statistical systems to meet the data needs of the 2030 Agenda requires urgent political commitment, financial investment and stronger cross-sector partnerships.

An annual flagship publication of ESCAP, the Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2025 uses the latest data for global SDG indicators to determine where additional effort is needed in the region and where momentum for future progress is building. (PTI)

# Everything has been accidental in my life: Ravi Varman on joining American Society of Cinematographers

**NEW DELHI, Feb 18:** Ravi Varman, one of the most celebrated cinematographers in Indian cinema, remembers the exact moment that sparked his interest in images - when he saw an out-of-focus picture of his late mother as a young boy.

Varman, who was probably 12 at the time, said he stole the picture from a neighbour's wedding album.

"Children love their mothers. I loved mine too. In villages, people don't click those many photographs. After two-three years of her passing, I wanted to remember her face. One of my neighbours had clicked some pictures at a wedding. In that picture, my mother is standing outside our hut and her silhouette is a little out of focus.

"When they showed that picture to me, I stole it and took it to a studio and innocently asked them that I want to see my mother's face. I got to know that it was not possible as it was an out-of-focus silhouette," Varman told PTI in an interview.

The cinematographer, who has worked for some of the biggest filmmakers like Mani Ratnam, Imtiaz Ali, and Sanjay Leela Bhansali, often circles back to that moment in his conversations and the accidental nature of his journey that has taken him from his village Poyunderkkudikkadu in Tamil Nadu's

Thanjavur to now being inducted in the prestigious American Society of Cinematographers.

"Out-of-focus silhouette" was a new phrase that stayed with him.

"Because of that incident, I bought a Zenit camera when I got my first pay cheque. I slowly started learning about photography. Maybe it was my mother's wish and she taught me... Everything has been accidental in my life," said Varman, who dropped out of school after losing his parents and moved to Chennai.

The self-taught cinematographer, who has lensed films such as "Tamasha", "Ram-Leela", "Barfi!", "Jagga Jasoos" and "Ponniyin Selvan I-II", said while being a member of the Los Angeles-based society doesn't add much to his job, hopefully, it will inspire others. The only other Indian cinematographer who is part of ASC is Santosh Sivan.

"It is more like a personal victory. I hope it will keep me alive among younger generations and when they look up, they will see that there was an Indian cinematographer there. That he started from zero, without any background, but he still reached there. So, why can't we? Maybe that's what this will do."

The journey to becoming one of the most

recognised directors of photography started with a train journey to Chennai without ticket, hiding in the bathroom, getting caught and being jailed.

"I spent 25 days in jail. In my village, most of the houses didn't have a door. You could go to any house and they will feed you first. But Chennai was a big city and I struggled a lot," said Varman, who began by working at a hotel and eventually found a foothold in the film industry.

The 51-year-old credits many "good souls" for helping him along the way.

"My girlfriend at the time, now my wife, was very confident about my knowledge when I started working as a stunt cameraman. She is an engineer and the woman I trust the most," he added.

Varman said he always wanted beautiful things to happen to him and he made them possible through his frames.

"When I came to the film industry, I realised I can create my own colour and beauty. I can bring my inner persona into the frame... I don't consider myself a technical person but when I read the script, I know how to light up a scene, and bring drama through lighting," he said, adding that he still remembers each and every frame he has created for the 32 directors he has worked with. (PTI)

## SAQIB, SABA ON WORKING WITH SUDHIR MISHRA IN 'CRIME BEAT': HE EASES YOU IN PROCESS, KEEPS IT REAL



**MUMBAI, Feb 18:** Working with Sudhir Mishra on web series "Crime Beat" was a learning experience for actors Saqib Saleem and Saba Azad, who called the veteran director one of the "easiest guys" to be around and a "grounded" person with the energy levels of a newcomer.

Saleem and Azad play crime journalists in the upcoming ZEE5 show, which has Mishra on board as showrunner and co-director along with Sanjeev Kaul.

Based on Somnath Batabyal's book "The Price You Pay", "Crime Beat" will start streaming from February 21. Saleem said he was initially "intimidated" by the filmmaker, known for "Hazaaroon Khwaishein Aisi", "Chameli", and "Serious Men", but Mishra made him feel at ease the moment the series went on floors.

"He's one of the easiest guys you could meet. He comes from so much experience and expertise in filmmaking and yet he doesn't let that come on to you. He eases you in the process. What I really enjoyed doing with him was seeing him in action. When he was directing, he had a different relationship with each actor.

"He had a way of bringing out what he had to from that actor just by the relationship he had with that person. It was so much to learn from a man who's been doing this for the last 40 years and still coming to set with the same amount of energy that he may would have had when he was doing his first film. It was great learning for somebody like me," the "Race 3" actor told PTI in an interview here. Mishra may be a legend, but he is also really easy to be around, added Azad.

"You expect this larger-than-life person and he is, but he's also really grounded and easy to hang out with. He makes everyone really comfortable and he's the most excited person on set. He doesn't sit for a second, so it feels like it's a first-time director but with the experience of a legend. "He's got the energy levels of a first-time director. He knows everything about his set. He's got a very friendly equation with his actors. He keeps it really real. Within the first day itself you're like 'this is going to be comfortable and amazing'," the "Rocket Boys" actor said.

"Crime Beat" also features Sai Tamhankar, Rahul Bhat, Danish Hussain and Rajesh Tailang in prominent roles. It is produced by Content Films Productions Pvt. Ltd. (PTI)



## Production begins on G D Naidu biopic starring R Madhavan

**NEW DELHI, Feb 18:** Production is underway on the India schedule of the upcoming biopic "G D Naidu", featuring R Madhavan in the role of Indian inventor and engineer Gopalswamy Doraiswamy Naidu. Madhavan will play the title role in the film, directed by Krishnakumar Ramakumar.

The actor shared the announcement on his Instagram handle on Tuesday. "Need all your blessings and good wishes," Madhavan captioned the post, which also featured the film's poster with "India Schedule Begins" written over it.

Naidu is referred to as the 'Edison of India' and is credited for the manufacturing of the first electric motor in India. He made significant contributions to a variety of fields, including mechanical, electrical and agricultural.

"G D Naidu" has music by Govind Vasantha and also stars Jayaraman, Yogi Babu and Priyamani in pivotal roles. It is backed by Varghese Moolans Pictures, Tricolour Films, and Media Max Entertainment. This is not the first time Madhavan is playing a real-life character on screen. He essayed the role of former ISRO scientist Nambi Narayanan in his 2022 directorial debut "Rocketry: The Nambi Effect". (PTI)

## PARMISH VERMA-STARRER 'KANNEDA' TO PREMIERE ON JIOHOTSTAR IN MARCH

**NEW DELHI, Feb 18:** Web series "Kanneda", fronted by Punjabi star-singer Parmish Verma, is set to start streaming on JioHotstar from March 21. Directed by Chandan Arora, the show also stars Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub, Ranvir Shorey, Arunoday Singh, Aadar Malik and Jasmin Bajwa in pivotal roles. The "high-stakes thriller" is produced by Jar Pictures.

Verma, known for songs such as "Look Classy", "Caran Caran", and "Dekhi Dekhi", will play the role of Nimma in "Kanneda".

"After escaping the horrors of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, Nimma arrives in Canada. But the streets are ruthless, the system is broken, and the world isn't waiting to welcome him. Explore Nimma's journey as he travels the distance between Canada and Kanneda," read the official synopsis of the series.

Verma said "Kanneda" is very close to his heart.

"Nimma's story is about identity, ambition, and the thirst for power. Playing Nimma was a unique experience and as an artist, it was an incredibly fulfilling one. I have put my heart and soul into Kanneda. I am super excited for its release on JioHotstar and am looking forward to the audiences' reaction," the singer-actor said in a statement.

"Power is intoxicating, but in this world, it's also a ticking time bomb. 'Kanneda' is the story of Nimma and Parmish has done absolute justice to the character. The soundtrack and music also adds immense value to the project. The stakes and the sheer force of this narrative makes it a must-watch. We're elated to collaborate with JioHotstar and cannot wait for it to be seen by everyone," added producer Ajay G Rai. (PTI)



## CASTING DIRECTORS HAVE FREED HINDI CINEMA FROM STOCK CHARACTERS: SHABANA AZMI



**MUMBAI, Feb 18:** Veteran actor Shabana Azmi on Tuesday said the growing prominence of casting directors in the Hindi film industry has led to a sea of change, allowing more "fascinating faces" to be cast in authentic roles. The actor, who completed five decades in cinema last year, was speaking at the trailer launch event of her Netflix thriller drama series "Dabba Cartel".

Directed by Hitesh Bhatia, the show follows five ordinary women and how their low-key dabba service spirals into an unexpected venture: a high-stakes drug delivery operation.

Asked what changes she had seen in her 50-year career in films, Azmi said: "For me, the advent of the casting director has brought a huge change... Look what the casting director has done. They have freed Hindi cinema from stock characters.

"So, we have got the most fascinating faces which are authentic.

And what that does also to mainstream actors is when you are surrounded by authentic characters, you also start sort of pulling up your socks."

A more realistic portrayal of characters today is also a welcome change, according to the multiple National Award winner.

"One of my favourite examples is Rishi Kapoor in 'Karz'. It was such a huge hit. But you can see that he's not playing the guitar, he's just drumming it. He's not doing anything with the chords. Today, it is impossible. I don't think any actor could get away and I don't think that any actor would think it is okay."

"The actor would take on the challenge and learn. This, in itself, is growth of actors all around and the fact that we are now taking many more interesting faces and that the stories don't have to be only about a pretty boy and a pretty girl. That's

brought a huge change both for men and for women," she added.

Azmi, star of films such as "Ankur", "Nishant", "Godmother", and "Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahani", said she is grateful for still being able to do the kind of work she enjoys doing.

"I happened to be at the right place at the right time. The fact that I'm working with younger actors who are bringing in completely different sensibilities from mine is always exciting. Most of the young actors come with trepidation that, 'What will happen next?' They realise soon that there's nothing like that and they become so comfortable that I have to remind them, 'I'm your senior, behave yourself,'" she quipped.

Set in the Mumbai suburbs of Thane, "Dabba Cartel" marks the first series collaboration between Netflix and Excel Entertainment.

Working on "Dabba Cartel" was a

'ghar ka maamla' (home affair) for Azmi as the show is produced by her stepson Farhan Akhtar and created by stepdaughter-in-law Shibani Akhtar.

"Dekhiye, ghar ka maamla hai. Bahu ne hukm diya, beta produce kar raha tha. Meri aukaat main naa bolun?" she said. At the event, the veteran actor said she tried to remove South star Jyotika, who also stars in "Dabba Cartel", from the series but the producers stuck to their guns. "I have to make a confession. I tried to remove two girls from this (show). One is Jyotika. She doesn't know this, but I said this.

"It's really creditable to these guys who said, 'You can do what you want. We are not going to replace her.' And, I am grateful that you (pointing to Jyotika) played it. It was my mistake. It would have robbed me of the pleasure of working with you," she said. (PTI)

# DJOKOVIC SAYS TENNIS PLAYERS HAVE A 'LACK OF TRUST' IN DOPING AGENCIES AFTER SINNER CASE

**DOHA, Feb 18:** Novak Djokovic says a majority of tennis players have lost faith in the anti-doping authorities following Jannik Sinner's three-month ban, and there's a widespread feeling that "favoritism" is being shown to the sport's biggest stars.

The 24-time major winner called on the World Anti-Doping Agency and the International Tennis Integrity Agency to overhaul their processes for dealing with doping cases "because the system and the structure obviously doesn't work."

"Right now there is a lack of trust generally from the tennis players, both male and female, toward WADA and ITIA and the whole process," Djokovic said at

the Qatar Open.

Top-ranked Sinner reached a deal with WADA on Saturday to accept a ban that will have him back playing in time for the French Open in May without having to miss a single Grand Slam tournament. That came after the International Tennis Integrity Agency had decided not to suspend Sinner for what it judged was accidental contamination by a banned anabolic steroid last March.

The short ban for Sinner came after five-time Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek accepted a one-month suspension in November after testing positive for a banned substance that she said was accidentally consumed be-

cause of a contaminated non-prescription medication. Both bans are much shorter than what other athletes in tennis and in other sports have normally received in similar cases.

"It's not a good image for our sport, that's for sure," Djokovic, the long-time No. 1 in men's tennis, said.

"There's a majority of the players that I've talked to in the locker room, not just in the last few days, but also last few months, that are not happy with the way this whole process (for Sinner) has been handled.

"A majority of the players don't feel that it's fair. A majority of the players feel like there is favoritism happening. It appears



that you can almost affect the outcome if you are a top player, if you have access to the top lawyers and whatnot."

Sinner had been scheduled to

play in Qatar before accepting the ban.

The handling of Sinner's case had already raised questions about double standards, and

when the ban was announced it was widely criticized by other players. The positive tests weren't publicly revealed until August because Sinner successfully appealed against being provisionally banned from playing. He then won the U.S. Open in September and the Australian Open in January.

Sinner's explanation for the positive test was that trace amounts of Clostebol in his doping sample was due to a massage from a trainer who used the substance after cutting his own finger, which WADA accepted.

Djokovic said he didn't question Sinner's and Swiatek's innocence but that he and other players are frustrated about the

inconsistent handling of doping cases.

He pointed to the case of former women's No. 1 Simona Halep — who was given a four-year ban by the ITIA in 2022 after a positive test before it was later reduced to nine months — and British player Tara Moore, who was suspended in May 2022 while an investigation lasted 18 months before an independent tribunal determined that her positive test for a banned substance was caused by contaminated meat.

"Right now it's a ripe time for us to really address the system, because the system and the structure obviously doesn't work, it's obvious," Djokovic said. (AP)

# WPL: Delhi Capitals, UP Warriorz eye improved batting effort

**VADODARA, Feb 18:** Delhi Capitals and UP Warriorz will be aiming for an improved batting effort here on Wednesday after floundering in their previous Women's Premier League matches.

Their clash is also the last match here at the Kotambi Stadium before the WPL action shifts to Bengaluru from February 21. The Capitals are yet to match the pre-tournament favourite billing with performances. Their batting has failed to fire in two matches, even in their victory over the Mumbai Indians. They made heavy weather of the chase of a 165-run target before winning by two wickets, and folded for 141 against the Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Monday during the eight-wicket defeat. The trouble starts from the top as skipper Meg Lanning has not been able to produce a big knock yet. It has seemed that international retirement has taken a toll on the Australian.

There have been occasional fireworks by Shafali Varma, Jemimah Rodrigues or Sarah Bryce, but they have not been able to convert into a substantial innings.

Their bowling has been in much better shape with veteran Shikha Pandey leading from the front, but she needs more support from others, particularly



from fellow pacer Arundhati Reddy. The UP outfit too is in a similar place. Grace Harris and Tahlia McGrath, their middle-order powerhouses, looked uneasy against spin and the Capitals have a capable bunch in Minnu Mani, Jess Jonassen and Radha Yadav. The Warriorz have invested heavily in skipper Deepti Sharma, young wicketkeeper batter Uma Chhetri and openers Vrinda Dinesh and Kiran Nav-

gire. It's not often that a WPL team fills their top four with Indian players, and the quartet will have to repay the faith of the management sooner than later.

The absence of an injured Alyssa Healy has reduced the firepower in their top order. They would also expect leg-spinner Alana King to make an impression against Delhi, as the Aussie spinner, who bowled that extraordinary Shane Warne-

esque delivery in the Women's Ashes, was quite expensive against Gujarat.

Teams (from):

UP Warriorz: Deepti Sharma (captain), Alana King, Gouher Sultana, Saima Thakor, Grace Harris, Shweta Sehrawat, Anjali Sarvani, Kiran Navgire, Sophie Ecclestone, Arushi Goel, Kranti Goud, Tahlia McGrath, Chamari Athapaththu, Poonam Khemnar, Uma Chetry, Rajeshwari Gayak-

wad, Vrinda Dinesh. Delhi Capitals: Meg Lanning (captain), Harleen Deol, Prakashika Naik, Beth Mooney, Kashvee Gautam, Priya Mishra, Bharti Fulmali, Laura Wolvaardt, Sayali Satghare, Danielle Gibson, Mannat Kashyap, Shabnam Shakil, Dayalan Hemalatha, Meghna Singh, Simran Shaikh, Deandra Dottin, Phoebe Litchfield, Tanuja Kanwar.

Match starts at 7.30 pm. (PTI)

Match starts at 7.30 pm. (PTI)

Match starts at 7.30 pm. (PTI)

# Mumbai City FC meet Hyderabad FC

**HYDERABAD, Feb 18:** Mumbai City FC will look to continue their promising form away from home when they take on hosts Hyderabad FC in their Indian Super League match here on Wednesday.

Mumbai City FC are currently positioned at the sixth place in the points table. They have 31 points to their name from 20 games, on the back of two victories and draws each in their previous five matches.

Hyderabad FC are at the penultimate spot, with 16 points from 20 encounters on the back of four wins and draws each — with two of those victories coming in their last four games.

The Islanders have been doing well on the road in the current campaign, winning four and drawing thrice in their last seven away matches.

A victory in this fixture would propel them to their maiden league double over Hyderabad FC, which would make Mumbai City FC the team with the most league doubles (13) over different opponents in the ISL.

However, Mumbai City FC faced a 1-3 setback to FC Goa in their last match, at home. Still, under Petr Kratky, Mumbai City FC have not yet faced consecutive losses and they will look to sustain that record with a posi-

tive outcome in the forthcoming match.

Contrastingly, Hyderabad FC have been on an encouraging run at home, winning their last two matches there — by 3-2 against Jamshedpur FC and 3-1 vs Mohammedan SC.

A third straight home win will equal the feat that they scaled in October-November 2022, when all triumphs had come with a 1-0 scoreline.

In the last match between the two sides on November 30, 2024, Mumbai City FC had edged past by a slender 1-0 margin.

Hyderabad FC have been found on the back-foot defensively, giving away nine headed goals in 2024-25, which is the joint-highest in the competition. The team has kept the least clean sheets (2) in the ISL 2024-25, conceding the most goals (41) amongst all 13 teams.

Ramhlunchhanga won possession four times in the final third against Odisha FC in their last game, the joint-highest by any player in a single game this season. He has won possession 17 times in the final third this term, the most by any Indian player. The 23-year-old has scored once, assisted thrice, and registered 25 touches inside the opposition's box too. (PTI)

# Return of top teams for CT means a lot to Pakistan cricket: Wasim Bari

**KARACHI, Feb 18:** Former captain Wasim Bari is glad to see the return of a global cricketing event to Pakistan through the ICC Champions Trophy, and hopes that the nightmarish days after the militant attack on Sri Lankan team in 2009 are forgotten forever.

Pakistan could not host international cricket for 10 years after that gruesome day, and were forced to play their home matches in the UAE. Bari was serving as the Director in the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) under the Chairmanship of late Ejaz Butt when the attack took place on March 3 near the Liberty roundabout close to the Gaddafi stadium.

"It was the worst day in my life when news came through of what had happened. Everyone was numb and most of us in our offices realised immediately this was going to put Pakistan cricket back by a few years," Bari said.

Bari said there was disbelief followed by sorrow when the governments of both the nations and the ICC got involved, and later a chartered flight was arranged to send the Lankan team back home.

Six policemen and two others were killed in the attack and several were injured including Pakistani umpire Ahsan Raza, who later had to undergo a life-saving operation.

Bari recalled that when pictures of the bullet-ridden bus and vans carrying the match officials and umpires in blood stained shirts went viral, it became obvious that Pakistan's hopes of staging the Champions Trophy or even the 2011 World Cup matches had vanished.

Without putting blame on anyone, Bari said: "It should never have happened and the result was Pakistan cricket couldn't properly grow for the next 10 years, as all teams refused to play in Pakistan for security reasons."

Bari said he is delighted to see the ICC Champions Trophy being held in Pakistan now and multiple teams landing in the country.

"To see England, Australian, South African, New Zealand and Afghanistan teams in Karachi and Lahore means so much to all Pakistani cricketers, board officials and the fans," he said. (PTI)

# ICC approves Jamieson as replacement for Ferguson in NZ's CT squad

**KARACHI, Feb 18:** Kyle Jamieson will replace injured pacer Lockie Ferguson in New Zealand's squad for the Champions Trophy after the ICC Event Technical Committee approved the change on the eve of their campaign-opener against Pakistan here on Wednesday.

Thirty-year-old Jamieson, who has played 13 ODIs, was named as a replacement after Ferguson was ruled out due to an injury to his right foot.

This will be Jamieson's first ODI match since playing against Bangladesh in September 2023, and the first interna-

tional appearance after the first Test against South Africa in February last year.

Since that Test, the 30-year-old had to sit out of all the action because of stress fracture on the back.

The doctors had advised him year-long rest and recuperation.

The strapping pacer returned to competitive cricket through the Super Smash T20 in January for Canterbury.

Fellow pacer Ben Sears too made his return through the Super Smash and was drafted into the national squad for the ICC showpiece. (PTI)

# Real Kashmir move up the ladder as Namdhari pay the penalty

**SRINAGAR, Feb 18:** Real Kashmir FC scored a home win as they beat Namdhari FC 1-0 after an early strike by Paulo César in their I-League match here on Tuesday.

With five victories in the last seven games, the Snow Leopards have recovered from their poor form in the mid-season and re-announced themselves in the 2024-25 title race.

Brazilian striker Paulo César scored the only goal of the game from the penalty spot in the seventh minute.

Real Kashmir, who are the only side yet to lose at home this season (six wins and three draws), have overtaken Namdhari for second spot with 26 points in 15 matches.

On the other hand, the Punjab side are in a slump, winning just one of the last five games that has seriously dented their title chances.

Inter Kashi, who will meet SC Bengaluru later in the day, are currently in fourth place with 24 points from 14 matches. The result also ensured Churchill Brothers, who are at 28 points, will remain top of the table until the end of

Round 15, at least.

Real Kashmir were their usual confident selves at home and began on the front foot, with Karim Samb earning the penalty after being tripped by Joseph Gordon. Paulo César stepped up and sent goalkeeper Jaspreet Singh the wrong way to score his sixth goal of the season and put the hosts ahead. The Snow Leopards' lead would've been doubled in the 20th minute if not for a sensational last-ditch tackle by former Real Kashmir defender Lamine Moro.

Karim Samb, who was slipped

through on goal by Asrar Rehber, rounded Jaspreet and seemingly had an open net to aim at until Moro executed an impeccable slide, nicking the ball off the Senegalese's feet barely a yard off of the goal. Mohammad Inam, who scored Real Kashmir's winner against Gokulam Kerala in the previous round, looked lively again. A few minutes before half-time, he cut through the middle and hit a powerful shot that was palmed away by Jaspreet. The attack was kept alive by the hosts and Asrar set up Karim Samb,

whose first time shot was blocked by Harpreet Singh as Namdhari continued to defend desperately.

The visitors had been rather blunt in attack in the first half and their talisman Cleudson Carvalho da Silva was aching to change that in the second. The Brazilian often lacked support in the final third and had to rely solely on himself.

In the 62nd minute, he got half a sight of goal for the first time in the match after getting some space behind Aminou Bouba. He tried to lob the goalkeeper but slightly overhit it. (PTI)

# WADA explains reasons for different doping bans for Sinner and Spanish figure skater

**MADRID, Feb 18:** The World Anti-Doping Agency offered an explanation for why top-ranked tennis player Jannik Sinner received a much shorter doping ban than the six-year suspension it handed to a Spanish figure skater in a similar doping case.

Spanish media has been calling attention to the lengthy ban handed to local skater Laura Barquero after she tested positive for the anabolic Clostebol, the same substance that earned Sinner a three-month ban after a settlement reached between WADA and the Italian tennis player on Saturday. The deal was criticized by many of his fellow tennis professionals this weekend.

WADA pointed out that while both cases involved the same substance, the specific facts related to Barquero's case were "very different" to Sinner's.

"The fundamental difference between the two cases is that Ms. Barquero's version of how the substance entered her system was unconvincing in light of the evi-

dence, such that the circumstances remained unknown as far as WADA was concerned," WADA said on Monday in an email sent to The Associated Press.

"In contrast, in the Sinner case, the evidence clearly confirmed the athlete's explanation as outlined in the first instance decision."

Barquero first tested positive for Clostebol during the 2022 Winter Olympics, then again in January 2023 in an out-of-competition test carried out by the International Skating Union. WADA eventually entered into a "case resolution agreement" in which the athlete was suspended for six years. It said the agreement was accepted and signed by WADA, the ISU and the athlete herself.

"If Ms. Barquero did not agree with the proposed sanction, she was not obliged to sign the case resolution agreement and was free to take the case forward for hearing at CAS," WADA said.

The agency had sought to ban Sinner, a three-time Grand Slam champion, for at least one year. It



had challenged a decision last year by the International Tennis Integrity Agency not to suspend Sinner for what the ITIA judged was accidental contamination of the banned anabolic steroid last March.

WADA formally withdrew its appeal saying it accepted the athlete's explanation for the cause of the violation, and that Sinner did not intend to cheat.

Sinner's explanation was that trace amounts of Clostebol in his doping sample was due to a massage from a trainer who used the substance after cutting his own finger.

Barquero's Instagram account republished several stories calling attention to the discrepancy in the punishment given to her and to Sinner. She then posted a video talking about how her lengthy sus-

pension had affected her.

"It's a disproportionate sanction that meant the end of my career," she said.

"I believe it serves as a clear example of the failures of the system. I really don't know what happened. But I have to assume the consequences, accept the current regulations and face sanctions that sometimes are extremely disproportionate."

The 23-year-old Barquero said she decided to accept the six-year ban based on "unfair rules" and so she could start moving on with her life.

She said the trace amounts of Clostebol showed up in her results through the contamination of a cream commonly used to treat skin wounds that is sold in Italy without prescription and not intended to improve sporting performance.

"I had the misfortune of accidentally contaminating myself with a cream that a colleague had bought and that was used by people close to me," she said. (AP)

# Champions Trophy set to start amid debate on relevance of 50-over cricket

**DUBAI/KARACHI, Feb 18:** Intrigue, uncertainty, backstage drama. The ICC Champions Trophy has seen it all even before the curtains go up on the tournament and it would only get more stirring over the next three weeks, starting with the opening clash between Pakistan and New Zealand in Karachi.

Eight teams will vie for a trophy, often talked up as tougher to win than the World Cup, and also to script a new chapter in their own cricketing story. While India will fight it out in Dubai, others will be primarily based in Pakistan, which would get to host its first ICC event since the 1996 World Cup.

Several barriers had to be hurdled over to cobble this tournament together after eight years. The tournament is also crucial amid the raging debate on the relevance of ODI cricket, which is struggling to find its space amid the rage for T20 cricket and the devotion for Test format.

Perhaps, no other cricketing event in the recent past has been harried so much by long-standing geopolitical tensions, stubbornness by administrative boards of two important participants, and the nail-biting anxiety over the readiness of venues in the main hosting nation.

The chaos has been an endearing throw-back to the 90s when cricket in the sub-continent resembled a hastily organised party.

But all these pre-tournament jitters will be forgotten once the teams enter the field, and the first of them will be Pakistan and New Zealand.

If anyone needs a reminder, then Pakistan had won the last edition of the Champions Trophy in 2017.

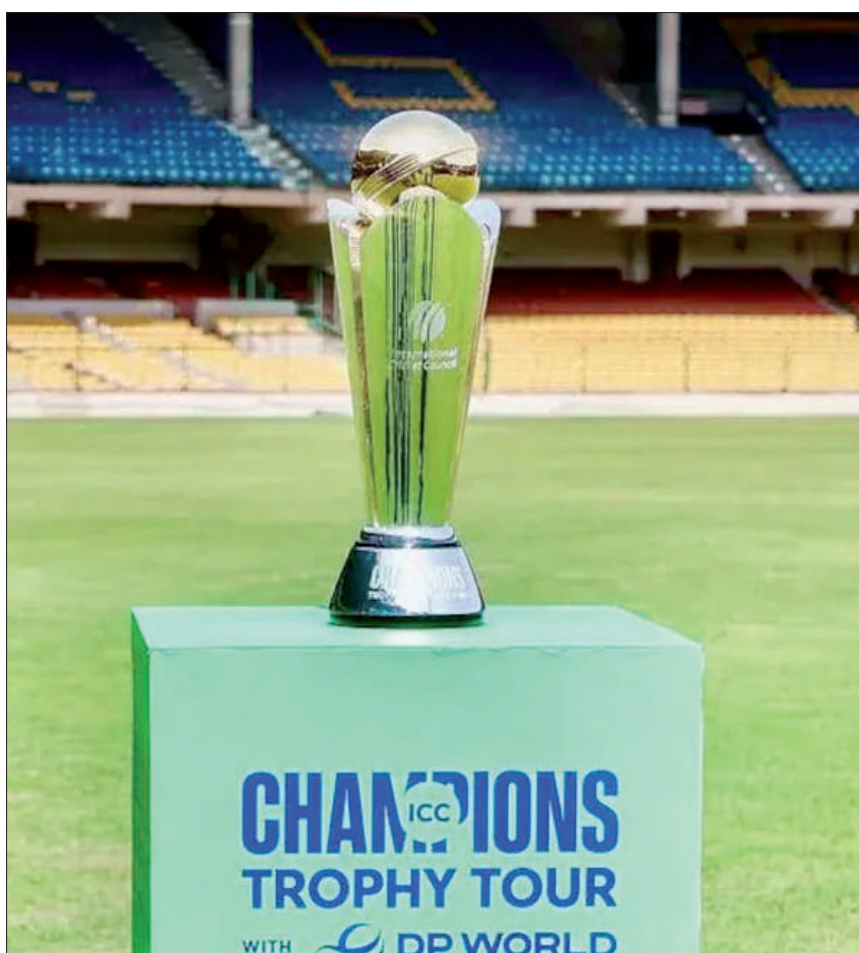
The opening match in itself is a curious clash -- a talented-yet-volatile Pakistan unsure of its own destiny against a team for which order is everything.

But the blue riband match of the tournament will be on February 23 when India take on Pakistan, ushering in customary waves of nostalgia, emotions, political grand-standing, and the social media battle.

That marquee showdown will be in Dubai as India remained steadfast in its refusal to set foot on Pakistani soil owing to security concerns.

But beyond such team equations, certain individual players would want this tournament to be a memorable one.

On top of the list are India's batting talismans Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma. They



have been magnificent servants of the game over the last decade and half.

Few in modern era were able to match their achievements and aura. But now, these two titans have reached the last lap of a long race, and would want to bow out in a blaze of glory.

It's tough to imagine Kohli and Rohit being part of India's ODI set-up after the Champions Trophy irrespective of the outcome.

It might even impact their future in Test cricket, as a lukewarm outing here might force the selectors to mull over their role ahead of India's tour to England in June.

Similarly, a failure to win the Champions Trophy will bring the role of head coach Gautam Gambhir under scrutiny.

Gambhir might have received a temporary

relief after India's domination over England in the recent home series, but not it wouldn't be enough to brush under the carpet, India's recent travails against New Zealand and Australia.

But a global trophy will certainly give him a much better ground to stand.

From a team perspective, India will be eager to wrest their first ICC trophy in the 50-over format after their triumph in the 2013 Champions Trophy under the enigmatic Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

It will be a perfect parting gift to Kohli and Rohit and a welcome carpet to some young names such as Shubman Gill who are set to take India into the future.

India are playing a brand of ODI cricket that makes them instant favourites to win the tournament. They have adopted an aggres-

sive approach and have a varied line-up, brimming with talent.

But such calculations can go wrong because of a bad moment or session, as it happened in the 2023 World Cup final when India succumbed to Australia after a mid-dling batting effort.

The Aussies themselves are without their premier pacers Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood. But the two-time champions still pack a punch as they have a batting unit to meet the demands of ODI format.

Once a feared white-ball team, England have slipped a few rungs as age and form have caught up with some of their leading performers.

But do the likes of Jos Buttler, Joe Root and Liam Livingstone have one last roar left in them? Or will some of their new stars such as Harry Brook or Ben Duckett cut open a new path?

New Zealand are also travelling on fresh avenue following the retirement of Trent Boult and Tim Southee. Kane Williamson is their trump card and the Kiwis would hope that he fires for them to earn their maiden white ball ICC trophy.

South Africa too will have a similar goal. They had won ICC Knockouts Trophy in 1998, but not bagged anything in recent times and the Temba Bavuma-led side will be hoping for a reversal of fortune.

But for that to happen, the Proteas should coat their minds with steel in crunch situations.

It's applicable to Pakistan as well. If they can stop obsessing over the match against India and not treat it as the 'final frontier', then the home side is a dangerous opposition.

Their pace attack is top-notch and they have some batters like Fakhar Zaman and Salman Ali Agha who can turn on the heat on the rivals.

Afghanistan, who have transformed into a formidable white-ball outfit, also can put other teams under immense pressure through a squad that has Rashid Khan and Rahmanullah Gurbaz.

Bangladesh now has receded to the periphery of cricketing consciousness, but can they pull off a stunner as they had done in the 2007 50-over World Cup?

It would be a fitting tribute to a tournament that has already gone through several disruptions. So, let the play begin. (PTI)

## Zelezny's tweaks will take me to 90m mark soon: Neeraj Chopra



**NEW DELHI, Feb 18:** Two-time Olympic medal-winning javelin throw star Neeraj Chopra has revealed that his new coach Jan Zelezny has figured out mistakes in his technique and would now make some adjustments to his throwing routine to achieve the 90m mark that the Indian star is pursuing for a while.

The 26-year-old, while speaking to India Today, also opened up about his hush-hush wedding to former tennis player Himani Mor last month, saying that their relationship was a casual friendship at first "but slowly we fell in love". Chopra has been trying hard to hit the 90m mark. His personal best stands at 89.94m which was achieved in 2022. His season begins in May with the Diamond League and would mark the competitive start of his partnership with Zelezny, a former Olympic and world champion who also holds the world record (98.48m).

"I believe a 90+ throw is happening soon. He (Jan Zelezny) has made some technical adjustments in my game," said Chopra.

"He (Zelezny) feels that his tweaks would help me. I've been able to understand what he expects from me. One of the mistakes that he told me about was how I was throwing very low even in Paris and that I was leaning towards the left.

"If I am able to incorporate those changes, I think I will get a lot better," he added.

But the Panipat-lad insisted that the milestone is still not as

important as winning medals for the country.

"I want to do it myself. But, going to a competition and winning a medal against people who have previously thrown 90 meters is even more important. There's no point in throwing 90 meters and not winning.

"What if everyone throws 90+ there and despite throwing 90, you don't win? I want to throw more than 90 meters; everyone believes I can do that. Klaus (Bartniet, his former coach) believed it, Zelezny believes it.

"It will come off if I can fix the javelin line. I am giving my 100 percent, and that is important for me," he added. He also spoke about the groin injury that marred his season last year. Chopra has consulted a doctor recommended by Zelezny in Prague.

"Groin injury has been an issue for a long time. I wasn't able to give 100 percent in my technique because of my injury. I went to Zelezny's doctor in Prague, and he suggested some exercises. I am working on that, so hopefully it helps, and I am able to give my 100 percent," he said. Opening about his marriage that stunned everyone, Chopra said both he and Mor wanted it to be an intimate affair and that's why they chose a town near Solan.

"I knew her. She also comes from a family with a sports background, and so do we. Her father and mother were kabaddi players. Her brothers were boxers and wrestlers," Chopra said. (PTI)



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